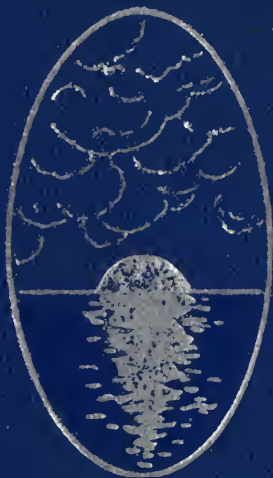


MOONGLADE



By the Author of
"THE MARTYRDOM
OF AN EMPRESS"

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MOONGLADE

A NOVEL

BY THE AUTHOR OF

The Martyrdom of an Empress

OFFICIER DE L'ORDRE DE L'INSTRUCTION

PUBLIQUE DE FRANCE

by Margaret Cunliffe Owen

See Halkett & Laing's

Dict. of Anon. & Pseudo. Eng. Lit.



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"THE MARTYRDOM OF AN EMPRESS"

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TO
A
WITH
EVERLASTING THOUGHTS

MOONGLADE

MOONGLADE upon the waters whitely lying;
Though the wind, shouting from the western verge,
Herdeth the huddled cloud-rack, flying—flying—
Glory still re-emergent, rift-descrying,
Spanneth the somber surge.

Moonglade, O Moonglade, heavenly calm and still,
Throned on the tossing manes unbroke to thill,
I know, beholding thee,
The storm will pass, and night upon the sea!

Moonglade the dark lanes of the forest keeping,
Soundless and silent, hearken as ye list;
Lakes of bejewelled vapor lowly sleeping,
And the long grasses from the surface peeping
Levelled of silver mist.

Moonglade, O Moonglade, that your Fates fulfil,
In your black forest-prison sweetly still,
I know, beholding thee,
Lights of the lost world, Faith and Purity!

Moonglade, empearled of flame unearthly, lying
Over the crystal plains of snow and light,
While the lost wind, of naked cold a-crying,
Shudders beneath the half-shut stars espying
Down from the steely night.

Moonglade, O Moonglade, heavenly calm and still,
Moulding to beauty bitterness and ill,
I know, beholding thee,
Yet is there strength, and truth and constancy!

Moonglade, a pale and forthright splendor, deeping
The mountain shadows on the river-flow,
Across the sullen flood's resistless creeping—
Across the years, the wreckage and the weeping,
You stand, so let them go!

Moonglade, O Moonglade, that my heart doth fill,
Causeway to Avalon unchanging still,
I know that pass by thee,

The "bowery hollows, crowned with summer sea"!

MOONGLADE

CHAPTER I

The Sphinx, prophetically sung
By Fable old, and ever young,
Is Beauty perilous, that stands
With eagle wings and taloned hands.

"MADEMOISELLE SETON is requested to come down to the parlor."

The white-coiffed nun stood inside the door, waiting for the tall girl who at the words had briskly risen from the first rank of her fellow-pupils. She was older than any there, and her whole *allure* as she stepped forward betrayed a certain sense of superiority and conscious pride. Silently she followed Madame Marie-Immaculée along the stone-paved and arched passage leading to the broad, shallow stairs, her step as light and noiseless as thistle-down, rhythmed, as it were, to the musical tinkle of her leader's great rosary. In the vaulted hall below she made a deep obeisance, and passed into the *parloir*, leaving the nun on the threshold, as is the rule.

The *parloir* of the Sacred Heart Convent at Bryn is a cheerful place, and was full of sun-rays that morning. Plants carefully tended showed their green leaves and bright blossoms on the window-sills behind the snowy sheerness of tightly drawn curtains, the old oaken furniture shone with numberless polishings, and a great silver-

MOONGLADE

and-ivory crucifix fastened to the pale-gray wall gleamed benignantly above a jardinière filled with freshly gathered "votive" heathers. Blinking a little in all this brightness after the dimness of the corridor, the girl hesitated a second.

"Good morning, Laurence. Don't you see me?" The voice was prim, exceedingly correct in enunciation, and high-bred in accent.

"Oh, is that you, Aunt Elizabeth?" the girl said, coming quietly forward, a cool hand outstretched. "When did you land?"

"Two hours ago, at Tréport. And I am here to take you back with me this evening."

This was delivered much in the manner of a pronunciamiento, and the recipient thereof raised her eyebrows nervously.

"This evening!" she echoed. "Why so much haste, Aunt Elizabeth, pray?"

"Because you have been here four years, which is much longer than we wished you to remain," the elder lady stated, tartly. "You are eighteen, and, being English, it is high time that you should become reaccustomed to British ways and manners."

A quaint little smile drew up the corners of Laurence's lips, but her eyes remained serious. She was a singularly beautiful girl, graceful of figure, dainty-featured, and gifted with an alabaster complexion and a wealth of chestnut hair that would have made even a plain woman attractive.

"You find me too Frenchified?" she queried, twisting the azure ribbon of her silver medal around her fingers—for she was an "*Enfant de Marie*," and one of the model pupils of her convent-school.

"Ye-es," hesitated Lady Seton, raising her lorgnette the better to study this "uncomfortable" niece. "Ye-es! I am afraid so, but we will soon alter all that!" And she

MOONGLADE

let the lorgnette drop to the very end of its interminable amethyst-and-pearl chain. "You had better get your things ready as quickly as you can, Laurence," she continued, "for neither your uncle nor the tide is wont to wait, and I shall come back for you at six o'clock sharp."

"You crossed on the *Phyllis*, then?"

"Why, of course! What else would have landed us at Tréport?"

"I don't know," the girl indifferently replied.

Lady Seton shrugged one shoulder, not in the acceptedly Gallic way, which she would have condemned, but in a slightly contemptuous fashion.

"Be ready, bag and baggage, at a quarter to six, please, *without fail*. I'll be glad to see you out of that ghastly black uniform—or whatever you call it! It is decidedly dowdy!"

Laurence laughed, smoothed the straight alpaca folds falling from shoulder to ankle, and glanced at her aunt quizzically.

"I am going to interview the Mother Superior," pronounced the latter again, and then I shall go, so that you may have an opportunity to take all the hysterical farewells you choose from your beloved friends here."

Hysterical! Laurence laughed once more her low, mocking laugh, and effaced herself before the rangey form of her aunt as her British ladyship set off, under full sail, sweeping past Madame Marie-Immaculée—still pacing monotonously up and down the hall, out of hearing, but in full sight of the *parloir* door.

"Poor Mother Superior!" Laurence mused, with piously raised eyes. "Poor Mother Superior! I hope my delightful aunt will have nothing but edifying things to say of me; she is not overburdened with tact, as a rule!"

As she reascended the stairs she was suddenly met by a whirlwind of outstretched arms, flying golden hair, and

MOONGLADE

skirts of alpaca like her own, which flung itself headlong upon her.

"Laurence! Laurence! Have they come for you already? . . . Oh! Oh, Laurence!" The breathless sentence ended abruptly in a burst of whole-hearted sobs as Marguerite de Plenhœl clung desperately about her comrade's neck.

"*Voyons, mon petit,*" consoled Laurence, keeping her equilibrium with wonderful ease under the circumstances. "*Sois raisonnable!*"

But the fifteen-year-old evidently was disinclined to listen to reason, at least just then, for she went on choking and gasping, and entreating betweentimes: "Don't go away, Loris. Don't leave me! Don't!"

"Hush! Hush, little one! Hush! Let's slip into the garden. They'll hear you if we stay here!"

"We—ca—n't—can't go in—into . . . the garden—with—out—permis—sion," Marguerite convulsively objected.

But Laurence was firm. "But, yes, we can. There's nobody about now. Come quick!" she commanded, half dragging, half carrying Marguerite down-stairs again. And thus at last they reached a small postern opening from the north wing, and stopped only when, still clasping each other, they stepped into the wonderful *allée* of lindens that skirts the cloisters on that side of the building.

The sun filtering through the pale leafage made swaying spots of pink copper all over the decorously raked gravel; the heliotropes and old-fashioned verbenas and rose-geraniums filling the borders smelled sweet to heaven, and in a near-by bosquet of laburnum a green finch sang to burst his little throat (*à se rompre la gorge*).

Marguerite—"Gamin" to her intimates—instantly became quieter. With a gesture that was very youthful and very impatient she pushed the tumbled gold out of her

MOONGLADE

big blue eyes, still brimful of tears, and stamped her narrow foot.

"Don't tell me it's true!" she cried. "Don't, Loris! It would be too terrible!"

Miss Seton—the Hon. Laurence Seton—in all the plenitude of her admirably controlled faculties, stared at the delightful tomboy beside her.

"It is true, my poor 'Gamin,'" she serenely stated, checking another outburst with a slight recoil of her supple body. "My excellent uncle and aunt have resolved that I shall go with them to '*la triste Angleterre*,' and so to the sad England I must go. *Voilà!*"

"But when—when?" demanded the quivering little creature. "When?"

Laurence hesitated. To tell the "Gamin" that only a few hours remained before her final departure from Bryn would destroy all her chances of making her preparations in peace; for this, alas! was a half-holiday, and Marguerite would be free to follow her about everywhere. To tell a frank fib was out of the question, of course. Laurence always avoided direct lies, so she took refuge in a simple evasion.

"How can I tell exactly? Such queer people as my relatives are apt to be unreliable," she equivocated. "You don't know my uncle Bob and my aunt Elizabeth, luckily for you, 'Gamin.' One can never guess what is going to happen next when they come on the scene!"

"They must be atrocious—abominable!" snapped poor Marguerite, her dark eyebrows meeting in a furious frown above her exquisitely arched little nose.

"N-no, not that; merely very tiresome and authoritative—insular to a terrible extent! He, as I have often told you, is a yachtsman above, before, after, and during everything else; by no means unkind, but as stubborn as a whole troop of mules. She—well, she's Elizabethan; not kindly nor good-looking, but worse! Brick-red morally

MOONGLADE

and physically, without any luster or brilliancy, fond of absolute power, narrow-minded, and—oh, well, quite unendurable.”

“O-o-o-o-h!” gasped Marguerite. . “Oh . . . o . . . o . . . o . . . h!”

“I am their ward,” Laurence continued. “They are my omnipotent guardians, and I can never hope to get rid of them, for I am a beggar, living on their rather acid bounty. Do you understand, *petit ‘Gamin’*?”

No, *petit ‘Gamin’* did not understand. There was something askew in that speech, somehow, something that grated upon her, though just what it was she could not have told. She therefore remained silent, her eyes fixed upon two yellow butterflies chasing each other round and round a clump of blue hortensias artistically grouped at the corner of the cloister beneath the leaden rain-spout, whose frequent libations kept those gorgeous globes of bloom from reverting to their original creamy pink.

“A beggar!” the child said at last. “A beggar! . . . Then why don’t you come and live with me at Plenhœl instead of with them in England?” There was extraordinary contempt in the way she said “them.” “I have only another year to stay here,” she passionately pleaded, “and every single thing I own will be half yours, Loris darling—every single thing!”

Eyes and hands uplifted, she gazed imploringly at Laurence, and for an instant a softer expression flitted across the latter’s somewhat sulky face.

“They would not let me do that—at any rate, not until I come of age,” she asserted. “No, decidedly not. . . . And, what’s more, I would not accept charity from your people, who are no relations of mine.”

Marguerite looked at her friend in positive amazement. “Charity!” she indignantly remonstrated; and then violently she cast herself prone upon the green border of the *allée*, kicking her tiny toes into the turf. “Charity

MOONGLADE

indeed!" she angrily cried from within the shelter of her intertwined arms. "Charity—to you!"

"Mademoiselle de Plenhœl!" a voice expostulated behind her; and Mademoiselle de Plenhœl regained her feet with amazing promptness, crimson with confusion, to face the most dreaded of her educators, Madame Marie-Antoinette, whose rigid manners and severe cast of countenance were the iron mask of a heart unsuspectedly tender.

"What does this behavior mean?" she now demanded, standing like a black statue of reproof within a yard of the culprit, her white hands folded within her wide sleeves.

"Pardon me, Madame Marie-Antoinette," Marguerite stammered, "but you . . . you see, Laurence is g-going away . . . soon!" Here tears of mingled rage and distress began again to run from beneath the heavy, drooping lashes!

An almost imperceptible wave of delicate color rose to the nun's still features and wiped twenty years from them! She, too, had known those great despairs of early youth—far greater ones, perhaps—and it was in an altogether altered voice that she replied.

"I am sorry to see you so unhappy, Marguerite," she said, drawing nearer to her, "but such outbursts of feeling are not seemly, my child; besides, they prove nothing—nothing at all—and are—er—vulgar!" She gave a little cough, and went on, equably: "Laurence has her duties as you have yours. So come with me now, at least until you have controlled yourself"; and as an afterthought she concluded, "By the way, you are both in contravention, for you are well aware that the garden and park are forbidden ground to you when unaccompanied by one of us."

Marguerite reverently touched a fold of the nun's robe. "I am sorry," she whispered very mournfully; "I am sorry!"

For a moment Laurence had been watching the picture made by the "Gamin" in this unusually contrite mood,

MOONGLADE

looking, in fact, quite like a little saint in the discreet sun-shower beneath the trees that dappled her slim black gown and formed a bright nimbus around her lovely lowered head. Twice she opened her lips to speak, but refrained. Then, courtesying deeply to the nun, she walked demurely indoors, where, however, as soon as she found herself alone, she raced at top speed up the stairs, thinking, as she went: "Better so. Outbursts are—are—vulgar, as Madame Marie-Antoinette has so sapiently remarked, and our poor 'Gamin' is still so very impulsive—so impossible to convince that I'd sooner not try it!"

CHAPTER II

Where first the wave, in long unrest
Rolled from the glamour of the West,
Breaks with the voice of Fate along
The shores of Legend and of Song.

THE sea was beating into unbroken foam at the foot of the towering cliff—an uninterrupted front of granite, quite unscalable except at narrow clefts four and five miles apart, which nobody would attempt except at low water, when a precarious path of shingle is laid bare between that grim rampart and the lip of the tide. A summer storm had raged for two days and nights along this terrible coast, and now, although the leadenness of the sky was thinning here and there to patches of faded turquoise, the waves, still savagely churned by the wind, were piling beds of semi-solid spume far above the ragged margin of the inner Bay of Plenhœl.

From the stone terrace of the Castle the sight would have been awe-inspiring to any but its inhabitants, hardened through generation after generation to such spectacles and such sensations. To the right of the fortress-like building a wall of spindrift whirling up an embayment of the *falaise* shut off all view of the coast to the eastward; to the left and in front chaos reigned supreme in a fathomless gulf, while behind it miles of pine forest stretched to the crest of the table-land in endless tossing manes of somber green.

Five hundred feet of sheer cliff about which thousands

MOONGLADE

of gulls flew screaming in and out of the roaring gusts of the gale, and down-shore the intermittent boom of a *souffleur* overtoning by many cavernous notes the great voices of sky and sea.

The library at Plenhœl is one of the most pleasing places imaginable. Long ago it had been a guard-room, where the officers of the garrison watched the offing from the tunnel-like window-embrasures, and the pikes of halberdiers resounded upon the granite-flagged floor. Some time after the Chouan wars it was transformed into an eminently "living" apartment, paneled in carved oak, book-lined on three sides, and pierced by many tall French windows that open upon a broad balcony of wonderfully wrought stone.

In one of the aforesaid embrasures that tempestuous morning the still, gracile silhouette of Marguerite de Plenhœl was outlined against the background of sea and cloud. She had grown a little since a year, but it seemed evident that she would never be either a tall or an "imposing" woman. But what could one not forgive in so lovely a little creature who, with her square shoulders and slim, round waist, looked wholesome and strong as any sand-poppy; whose delicately oval face was so full of happy life, from the deep-set blue eyes to the tender mouth, the patrician arch of the nose, and the obstinate little chin dented by a tantalizing *fossette*? The crinkly silkiness of her hair—that crowning beauty of hers—now piled upon her head in rebellious masses, shone even in the fog-dimmed light as she bent forward to gaze fervently through the panes, breathing on and rubbing them again and again to free them from their misted opaqueness.

She had been home for good a couple of weeks only, and greeted the convulsions of nature as a treat especially prepared for her; for now and then she clapped her hands and sketched a merry jig-step or two on the polished floor, evidently in applause of so stirring a scene. So absorbed,

MOONGLADE

indeed, was she in her contemplation, her lovely face flattened now against the glass, that she did not hear a door uncloset and shut behind her. She was counting aloud for the seventh fateful wave that all true-born ocean folk hold in so profound a respect.

"One, two, three, four, five, six . . ." she called, as if summoning the crowning surge in unconquerable impatience.

"Seven!" said a voice immediately at her side, and she whirled about on one toe to find herself confronted by a very tall man who was smiling amusedly.

"Basil!" she exclaimed. "Cousin Basil! Where did you jump from?"

"From the cliff path, which I don't recommend as a peaceful choice of promenade just now," he replied, calmly; but his fine gray eyes, nevertheless, held a suggestion of the pleasing battle he had just fought against the tempest.

"Why didn't you call me?" she reproached, with an adorable pout. "I would have liked so much to come with you."

"Little girls, my cousin," he answered, gravely, "should not be risked on the edge of draughty precipices."

The "Gamin" frowned. She was too young as yet to enjoy being called a little girl, and the riposte came at once.

"Where old gentlemen are safe, younger people may surely go!" she said, mischievously.

"Old gentleman . . . hummm . . . m! That's rather hard on me, isn't it, dear cousin mine?"

"Hard, why?" she retorted. "How old are you, anyhow?" And, standing on the very points of her tiny slippers, she pointed at his temples with two accusing fingers.

"One, two, three, four, five, six . . . silver threads among the bronze," she misquoted.

MOONGLADE

"And seven!" he coolly admitted, looking smilingly down at her. "Seven or more, what matters? I am thirty-four, you know, my little cousin."

"What matters indeed! You have enough privileges already, without expecting to remain always young."

"Privileges! You surprise me!"

"Certainly," she insisted. "Aren't you a great Prince, a Serene-Highness—just as in the fairy-tales? Haven't you huge, big estates in Russia and the Crimea, villas in the south of France, *fortins* in the Caucasus, mines in Siberia, besides loads and loads of money, jewels, picture-galleries, a private band of musicians, acres of hothouses, horses, stud-farms? A regular Marquis de Carabas, that's what you are!"

She paused for lack of breath, and once more he laughed.

"You overwhelm me, *ma cousine*," he mocked; "but since I am old, quite an old gentleman, you see . . . what are these manifold gifts to me?"

"Old! Oh, not so very old, after all!" she suddenly contradicted. "Fortunately you are handsome, and very, very tall. Whew . . . ew! You are tall! I love that! I despise small men. They're always barking and fussing, like black-and-tans. Don't you think so?"

"Your knowledge is indeed extensive, 'Gamin,'" he praised. "Yet it is scarcely necessary to be a giant in order to possess a kindly temper. I have met—"

"Never mind what you have met," she interrupted. "I know that you are good-tempered, and six foot four inches. That's enough proof of what I said just now."

"Thank you!" he began, dryly. But in one clean bound she cleared the space between the window and a ponderous oaken bench, upon which she perched herself, her feet ten inches from the immense rug covering all the middle of the room. "And now," she stated, "I must be reasonable, and grown-up, and all the rest of it, so that the

MOONGLADE

person who first exhorted me to listen to reason may not find me lacking in that desirable quality."

"Is there really a person bold enough to preach reason to *you?*" he commenced; but she silenced him by an eminently peremptory gesture.

"Listen!" she admonished. "Do you hear wheels?"

"Wheels?" he questioned, sincerely astonished. "In this storm?"

"And why not? Why shouldn't people travel in a storm when they are not imprisoned, as I am?"

"You are a prisoner?" Prince Basil asked, with amazement.

"Of course I am. Papa—the dear Saints of Brittany bless him—has decreed—decreed, you understand—'*J'ai décrété*' was what he said—he loves such sentences—that he would go alone to fetch *my* Loris at the station. You will agree with him, I am sure, 'little girls' should always be left at home. Eh?"

"What is 'your Loris,' if I may be so indiscreet as to ask, *petite cousine?*"

"What? You mean *who*, I suppose. She is the most beautiful girl in the world—an English 'professional beauty,' they say. She was at the Sacré-Cœur with me, and she loved me—yes, she loved me, though she played me a mean trick once; but it wasn't her fault, poor dear! I've never seen her since. And just imagine, her ogres of uncle and aunt have condescended to let her spend a month with us here—a whole month—thirty days—no, thirty-one, as this is the last day of June."

"This promises to be interesting," Basil remarked. "A gloriously beautiful maiden oppressed by avuncular ogres, and coming all the way from perfidious Albion to charm the natives of ancient Armorica! It sounds very well, when one comes to think of it!"

The "Gamin," who had pulled from the pocket of her white serge frock a handful of hazelnuts, and was joyously

MOONGLADE

cracking them one after another between her short white teeth, laughed and nearly choked herself.

"You have," she asserted, as soon as she could speak, "a funny way of expressing yourself, Cousin Basil. Why don't you add that a handsome Prince Charming came from much farther off yet, to do likewise?"

"Again? *Vous y tenez décidément, ma cousine!* Handsome is as handsome does, you know, and as yet I am not conscious of having behaved in any very remarkable way since my arrival!"

Marguerite raised her shoulders to the level of her ears, threw a handful of nut-shells in the bronze waste-paper holder at her side, and jumped from her lofty seat.

"It must be nearly eleven," she cried in sudden alarm. "We'll miss it all if we don't go down-stairs now, at once. Come quick."

"Miss what?" the impassive Prince demanded, slowly rising from the deep arm-chair where he had established himself.

But she had already glissaded to the head of the stairs, and it took all he could accomplish with his long legs to overtake her before she had quite succeeded in breaking her pretty nails, in endeavoring to open one of the tall windows giving on the north terrace.

"Leave that to me. The wind is straight against it. Wait, won't you, *please?*" he pleaded, his hand over both of hers, for she was still struggling manfully with the complicated fastening.

"I'm very strong," she panted. "I've done it lots of times."

Evidently she was very strong, for the window suddenly gave way and, had it not been for Basil's weight, would have knocked her flat. But little did she care for such slight contretemps. With a ringing war-whoop she raced out, her hair—instantly blown from its restraining combs by the whistling blast—streaming in clouds behind her,

MOONGLADE

her skirts flying back from her slim ankles, and danced wildly toward the carven parapet.

Basil, hastily securing the window from the outside, ran after her, afraid that she would really be whirled by the back-draught over the balustrade to the causeway below. He was laughing helplessly at the extraordinary antics of this queer little being who bewitched him, but when he caught up with her he took firm hold upon her arm.

"You imp!" he shouted, for the hurly-burly was such that he could not hear his own voice, nor her reply, for that matter; but it was not a very decorous one, to judge by the roguish sparkle of her eyes. However, she did not shake off his hand, which quite surprised him, and soon they were leaning side by side against a beautiful mediæval gargoyle hewn from the stone wall of the terrace, and at that moment disgorging the downpour of the morning hours.

Following her excited glance, he saw, away down at the foot of the causeway, a four-in-hand, fiercely beaten by the wind as it labored up the steep incline.

"*Les voilà! Les voilà!*" Marguerite shrieked, quite beside herself with delight. "They'll be here in ten minutes."

The words were flung in Basil's teeth by the tempest. But he had already recognized—his sight being unusually keen—his cousin de Plenhœl handling the ribbons, and seen that a slender feminine form, tightly cloaked and hooded, was sitting beside him. Far behind the equipage a *fourgon* was following, with the maid and luggage.

"Oh, look at the horses' manes!" shrieked Marguerite, pointing to the drag, now almost immediately beneath. "They are blown all sideways. Oh dear! How funny!"

"And what about yours?" Basil laughed, vainly attempting to capture in both hands the flying silk of her

MOONGLADE

glorious hair; but with another of her acrobatic bounds she darted from his side, turned the corner like a blown feather, and disappeared into the *Cour-d'Honneur*, where he hastened to join her, bullied by the wind and with less decorum than was his wont.

Great black clouds were once more piling up in the sky, and as the horses turned into the wide paved space a few enormous drops of rain began to fall.

Fortunately here there was some shelter from the storm, and it became possible to reassume some dignity of demeanor, if one felt so inclined. Marguerite, however, had no such cares, and as soon as her father—*Le Beau Plenhœl*, known since his early youth by the eminently unpretentious sobriquet of "Antinoüs"—had accomplished a masterly turn around the central fountain and brought his mettlesome team to a stand at the foot of the *perron*, she had clambered on the near wheel and, lifting herself to the box, was hugging Laurence Seton like a bear.

The Marquis de Plenhœl burst into hearty laughter and glanced indulgently at Basil, standing ready to help the two girls down. The grooms had jumped to the horses' heads, where they now remained, like twin wax figures incapable of movement or expression, under the pelting shower.

"*Mais, mon 'Gamin,'* let her get down!" Plenhœl called. "We'll all be drenched to the bone." And then only Marguerite regretfully leaped into his arms, making it possible for Basil to assist Laurence to the ground. Under such circumstances the introduction was necessarily quite unconventional, and, driven indoors by the rain now flooding in torrents from the leaden gutters overhead and ricocheting in the liveliest fashion from the steps, Marguerite and Laurence ran off without further ado.

Pulling off his long mackintosh and soaked driving-gloves, Plenhœl turned to his cousin:

"A dramatic *entrée!*" he said, grinning, and displaying

MOONGLADE

under his blond mustache teeth of a whiteness and regularity worthy of a boy of twenty. "With the 'Gamin' one can always expect something unforeseen," he added, leading the way to his den. "Here, have a dash of cognac, Basil. You look almost as pumped as I am!" And he pushed the tantalus toward his relative. "It will sharpen our appetites for luncheon, too."

Basil quietly possessed himself of a very easy chair, and, declining the spirits by a gesture, lighted a cigarette.

"Who and what is that ethereal apparition who is throwing our 'Gamin' into such convulsions of joy?" he asked, lazily following with his eyes a ring of smoke floating toward the caissoned ceiling.

"Hum-um!" "Antinoüs" replied, setting down his little glass and drying his mustache on his handkerchief. "A very beautiful person, as you may have seen."

"I did not see. She was cowed like a monk, and, save for a bit of resolute chin and the gleam of an interesting pair of eyes—"

"Oh, she's beautiful; no doubt about that, my boy; but as far as I have been able to judge—which is not much, I admit—she is scarcely the sort I would have accused the 'Gamin' of turning into an idol."

"Accuse is severe!" Basil remarked, knocking the ashes from his cigarette with the tip of his little finger. "What's amiss with her? You don't mean that she's a dark filly?"

"No. . . ." "Antinoüs" hesitated. "No—but hard in the mouth, and a bit sultry in temperament, I should say. Of course it is hard to judge, where the Anglo-Saxon 'Miss Independence' is concerned; but this one has been admirably brought up by our good ladies of the *Sacré-Cœur*; and moreover I understand that all her life she has been pruned, and prised, and molded, and clipped by a dragon of an aunt—an ex-beauty—now rather long in the tooth, who, it appears, is not often inclined to joke.

MOONGLADE

But still the finished product of her labors inspires me with no extravagant amount of confidence."

Basil gazed thoughtfully at his kinsman. He knew him to be a connoisseur, and a fastidious one, at that, for all the women of his family were, or had been, renowned for their loveliness. Moreover, married at twenty-two to one of Brittany's fairest daughters, he had been left a widower fourteen months later, when Marguerite was born. Be it said to his praise, he had never dreamt of giving his dear "Gamin" a stepmother; but when all was said and done he was now barely thirty-eight, extraordinarily good-looking, and eminently disinclined by nature to keep his eyes closed when beauty was about.

"Not bridle wise?" Basil smiled up at Antinoüs. "According to your lights, at least?"

"Bridle wise! Who d'you take me for?" the Marquis protested. "You don't fancy I'd try to flirt"—he said "*fleureter*"—"with a damsel under my protection, do you? Besides," he added, naïvely, "she's not my style . . . not a bit of it!"

"Heaven be thanked, then," Basil gravely replied. "We can henceforth rest in peace!"

Plenhöel burst out laughing and clapped his cousin on the back. "There's the bell. Let's to table, unbeliever!" And he drew back to let Basil pass out of the room before him.

A surprise awaited Basil in the dining-room as he came down, after hurriedly brushing his hair to an admirable smoothness. By the opposite door Marguerite and Laurence were entering, and for the first time in his affectionate acquaintance with the "Gamin" he completely forgot her presence, for the lithe figure beside her and overtopping her by half a head almost took his breath away. Graceful as it is granted but few to be, "Miss Independence," as "Antinoüs" had called her—was, outwardly, at least, perfection. Her long hazel eyes had that

MOONGLADE

slight droop at the outer edges of the lids which makes so much for beauty and expression; her small, well-cut mouth and high-bred features, the oval of her jasmine-white face, and her coronal of warmly auburn braids, made up an altogether uncommon *ensemble*. Clad in vaporous lace-incrusted batiste of a creamy tint, melting into that of her exquisite skin, a knot of deep-red carnations carelessly thrust in her softly folded satin belt was the only touch of color about her, and Basil's eyes very nearly transgressed the dictates of good form as he looked at her. Truly, Plenhœl was difficult to please, he thought, taking his seat beside "the Marvel," as he already inwardly named her.

The poor "Gamin," although her rebellious tresses were now as neat as Laurence's own, her crumpled serge replaced by a pale-pink linen of irreproachable chic, remained during the entire meal unobserved by her big cousin; but she, nevertheless, filled her place as mistress of the house excellently well, and with a little air of importance that sat very prettily upon her extreme youthfulness. However, "Antinoüs," always immensely proud of his daughter, seemed lost in contemplation of this charming *vis-à-vis*, so that at first the conversational ball rolled uninterruptedly between the two others; but as a matter of fact he was thinking of some retrievers that were coming from England that week to add the charm of their thoroughbredness to his kennels—already too expensive, for, in the modern sense of the word, at least, he was not what is termed a very wealthy man.

After luncheon, the storm having not as yet abated, the little party went to what is called at Plenhœl the *Galerie des Ancêtres*—a particularly attractive apartment in which to spend a wet afternoon. Hung with ancient tapestries and decorated with armor of the best period, with an antique banner drooping here and there along the paneling above a row of knights' stalls of heavy carven

MOONGLADE

wood, this, together with a succession of splendid family portraits, preserved there the touch of the long ago, for the rest of the furnishings were amusingly heterogeneous. The great room terminated at both ends in monumental fireplaces. Fronting one of these was a huge billiard-table, balanced by a Pleyel grand piano, and opposite, to one side of the other chimneypiece, a large-sized organ was flanked by enormous palms in bronze tubs, while the rest of the thirty-odd yards of space was most variously occupied—tables great and small, loaded with albums, books, magazines, and flower-filled vases; a collection of sofas, pouffs and piled-up cushions; and many arm-chairs and benches, ranging from angular Gothic shapes to the most approved and lazy forms of to-day.

Here one could smoke, read, nap, or play games of all sorts without let or hindrance, since, besides the billiards, a set of graces, a game of bagatelle, a chess-board, a Dutch top flanked by its individual paraphernalia, and even a *jeu de petits chevaux* were ready to hand.

To-day, however, a strange and unaccustomed atmosphere seemed to pervade this home-like and delightful retreat. Basil, perhaps exhausted by his unwonted loquacity at lunch, had fallen silent, and stood near one of the windows, gazing dreamily at the soupy gravel drive and the dripping trees. Antinoüs, sunk to the shoulders into the mellowness of a brocaded smoking-chair, pulled pensively at his mustache, his eyes idly wandering over the pages of a two-days-old number of the *Gazette de France*, and neither of them said a word. Still, Marguerite and her guest, sitting side by side on an ottoman placed in a far-off embrasure, made up for it by chattering like magpies—but *sotto voce*, so that their "confidences" should not be overheard. In truth, their "confidences" had so far remained completely one-sided. Laurence spoke in a sufficiently lively fashion, but revealed nothing of her own doings and thoughts. That she was drawing

MOONGLADE

out the "Gamin" with superior skill would have been patent to a less simple little soul than Marguerite's.

"But," Miss Seton said at last, "you never told me that you have Russian relatives." And her eyes slid a furtive glance in the direction of Prince Basil.

"Didn't I?" Marguerite laughed. "I never thought of it in our convent days. You see, I did not know my cousin Basil then quite as well as I do now. It is like this. My grandfather's sister, Anne de Plenhœl, married Pierre Palitzin, and became Basil's grandmother. Am I expressing myself clearly?"

"Very clearly. And is Prince Basil an only child?" Laurence spoke in the tone of one who desires, out of mere politeness, to keep up a rather boring dialogue.

"Oh dear, no! He has the most exquisite sister. She married another relative of ours, Jean de Salvières. It's quite a mixed affair, those family ties of ours, like a Neapolitan ice, pink, and green, and mauve, and lemon, in stripes."

"De Salvières . . . The Duke?" mused Laurence, aloud.

"Yes! The Duke, of course! Do you know him, Laurence? He has a château on the Normandy cliffs—the château—*le plus beau château de France*, I believe honestly; and so picturesque, with its machicolations, its keep, its dungeons, and turrets and towers! It looks as if Gustave Doré had built it. Also Basil has two brothers—the youngest, who is in the *Corps-des-Pages* of the Czar, and then André, an officer in the *Chevaliers-Gardes*, all white and gold and silver, and taller even than Basil, with big blue eyes, a yellow mustache, a complexion as rosy as a baby's, a—"

"He must be lovely," interrupted Laurence, "and look as if he had rolled about on a rainbow, your cousin André."

Marguerite stared. The tone rather than the words surprised her. This quaint little being, still at the tender age of easy laughter and easy tears, hated mockery

MOONGLADE

when it was directed toward what she loved and honored. Her slangy childish tongue, so apt to speak at random, never gave its assistance to unkind sayings, and for the second time since they knew each other Laurence felt that she had struck a false note. Indeed, the "Gamin" looked at that minute like a small game-cock of ruffled plumage and sparkling eyes.

"I beg your pardon. I did not know a harmless joke could offend you," Laurence apologized.

"It did not offend me!" stoutly declared Marguerite.

"But—I don't know why—I can't bear to have my people laughed at."

"Your people! You are so excessively and exclusively a Bretonne, that one cannot realize your claiming kin with Muscovites."

"When I say my people I mean all who belong to me, which includes, of course, the Palitzins."

Again Laurence, not quite at her keenest on this occasion, overstepped the bounds of prudence, certainly those of Breton delicacy—which are finely drawn—for, piqued at Marguerite's plainness of speech—perhaps at something else, too—she quickly retorted:

"I am inclined to believe that you are in love with Prince Basil!"

Marguerite's blue eyes widened, her pretty lips straightened, and she rose to her feet.

"I am sure papa must be fainting with ennui," she said in a level voice. "Let's go and challenge him to a game of billiards. It is his hour for play!" And she glided off with the lithe grace which betrays great strength concealed in satin softness.

"The cut direct!" Laurence muttered, following her, and smiling in a fashion that strove, quite unsuccessfully, to be pleasingly indulgent. "Bother these Breton prudes! I'll have to mend my paces here, it seems," she muttered, as she crossed the gallery.

CHAPTER III

If the tongue's a consuming fire,
Then judging by the consternation
The written syllables inspire,
A letter is a conflagration.

"I'M sure you must be mistaken. It cannot be possible!"

Madame Gervex, Marguerite's governess and companion, turned her perplexed, good-natured face toward the gray-haired land-steward who had begun his labors at Plenhœl in the time of the present Marquis's father. They were standing together on the far end of a lower side terrace overlooking the green silver of the bay, to-day in one of its most charming and innocent moods. There was scarcely a ripple to be seen: a mere fringe of dainty foam hemmed the rising tide as it lazily fretted up the narrow pebbly beach. A cable-length or so beyond that lace-like border a large float rode at anchor, and Marguerite, Laurence, Basil, and "Antinoüs" were alternately to be descried taking glorious headers from its snowy planking into the placid depths.

"Impossible, Madame Hortense? And why impossible, if you please?" Sulian Quentin asked, with some asperity. "You are so soft-hearted and innocent yourself that you can't think anybody is made otherwise! Now I tell you—" And he emphasized each separate word with a smart tap of two fingers of his right hand on the hard, open palm of his left. "I tell you that this fine Demoiselle

MOONGLADE

from over the Channel is well worth watching. Sweet as honey when she speaks to you, but her linings have been dipped in gall, just the same. Bitter! Madame Hortense! Bitter she is to the very core, and envious and mean, and capable of anything that's not straight. I, Sulian Quentin, tell you this, and you'd do well to take my word for it!"

"But, Monsieur Sulian!" interrupted Madame Hortense.

"There's no Monsieur Sulian about it. D'you imagine that I've navigated for fifteen years before taking hold of things here for defunct Monsieur le Marquis, without learning how to keep my eyes open? Bah! I've seen in my time many sorts of female quality, brown and red and blond and black, pretty and otherwise, clever and stupid, good, bad, and worse, but just such a piece as this one—" He left his indictment incomplete, perhaps for lack of expressions fitted to his listener's ears, and allowed his long arms to fall to his sides in a discouraged manner.

"But," Hortense Gervex began again—"but what in the world made you take such a dislike to Mademoiselle Seton, Monsieur Sulian? She's doing you no harm!"

"Yes, believe that and drink water!" he derisively retorted. "Look at her now, *do*, just to oblige me!" He was angrily pointing downward, and Hortense Gervex bent over the coping to see what he meant.

Plenhœl and Marguerite were swimming shoulder to shoulder toward the open sea, with that calm, regular stroke which is so telling for long-distance work. On the float Basil's tall form showed clear as wax against the pale shimmer of the water, and, with her back turned to him, sat Laurence, on the very edge of the planking, her feet dipping in the sea, her hair falling around her mantle-wise and trailing behind her. Suddenly she turned, swung herself up on the float, and stood before him, her arms uplifted to raise above her head the shining mass of her

MOONGLADE

tresses, her perfect figure displayed to its best advantage by a bathing-dress of pure white cashmere that clung very lovingly; and there was something so challenging in her statuesque pose that the term of "professional beauty," naively applied to her a fortnight or so before by Marguerite, took on, indeed, a newer and more expressive meaning.

"The minx!" grumbled the old steward, elbow to elbow with Madame Hortense. "Oh, she'll net him, never fear—and to think that our Marquis, always so *malin*, alert, and wide awake, does not notice her manœuvres! As to Mademoiselle 'Gamin'—" He paused, blew out the air from his chest with a sigh like a Triton's, and resumed: "She's too young, thank the Saints, to perceive such wickedness, and yet she's sharp as a needle, and some day she'll see, and then!"

"Well what? What will she see some day, you old mischief? What will happen some day, according to you? After all, isn't the Prince free to marry whom he chooses? Isn't he rich enough for two? Why shouldn't he have a beautiful wife if he likes to? Have you any personal objection to offer, Monsieur Sulian?"

Astounded by this abrupt style of address, so entirely foreign to gentle, kindly Madame Hortense, Sulian Quentin turned to her, his self-advertised eyes wide open.

"D'you mean to tell me," he impressively pronounced, "that you'd approve of this one for him?"

Madame Hortense glanced meditatively in the direction of the float. "What have I got to approve or disapprove of in such a matter?" she said in a tone that went far toward answering his question. "Who are we, anyhow, to judge our masters?"

Quentin gave a short laugh. "Who indeed? Who are we, indeed? We who have served them loyally for year after year this long, long time; served them, and loved them, too! Yes, loved them as if they were our own chil-

MOONGLADE

dren: defunct Monsieur le Marquis, and Madame la Marquise, and our present Monsieur le Marquis and Mademoiselle 'Gamin.'"

"But what have they got to do with it?" asked Madame Hortense, beginning to feel utterly bewildered.

Quentin went back a step and glared at her.

"You're a bat—a real genuine bat!" he said, contemptuously, "that's all I've got to say. Daylight is nothing to you, so you might as well go on traveling in darkness all your days! Oh, have it your own way! Don't think again; it would be idle; but still let me compliment you on your sharpness, *ma bonne dame*. Nothing to them! . . . Nothing to them! That's a good one!"

He raised his arms far above his head in impotent protestation to an unkind Heaven, and, turning raspingly on his heel, left her without further ceremony to digest his cynical advice.

During Marguerite's convent days Hortense Gervex had lived at Plenhœl as a very superior sort of housekeeper, looking, together with Quentin, after the Marquis's interests, and keeping the château continually ready to receive him in the intervals of his trips to known and sometimes unknown portions of the globe. Years before, when widowed at twenty by the premature drowning of her husband, a fine young sailorman in command of a coasting steamer, she had come to Plenhœl as companion and reader to "Antinoüs's" mother. She was now fifty-five, extremely well preserved, and very comely, with her thick blond hair, slightly frosted with silver above the temples, her wholesome face, and calm, blue-green eyes; and she literally adored the "Gamin."

After Quentin's departure she remained for a few moments more, watching the bathers frolicking in the wavelets below. Marguerite and her father were swimming back now, and presently ran foul of a school of porpoises playing "follow-my-leader" with the utmost gaiety. Madame

MOONGLADE

Hortense saw Marguerite dive suddenly and come up immediately behind a big, shining fellow, whom she playfully slapped on the side. Girl and fish disappeared together in a quick smother of foam; then the fair head, darkened by immersion to a golden brown, emerged again and followed in the wake of the paternal one.

"Ah, my little mermaid!" murmured Madame Hortense. "*Ma jolie petite sirène!* Is what that scamp of Quentin hints at truly possible?"

Her affectionate eyes followed the thought to the float, and their expression slowly hardened. Laurence was still standing before Basil in the same provocative attitude, still busy with her splendid hair, twisting and untwisting it, as though to wring it dry. The hidden sun had just made up his mind to peep through his veil of pearly vapors, and a primrose glow of delicious warmth suffused the two figures. In that revealing light Madame Hortense became suddenly aware of the science that had presided over the making of Miss Seton's costume, in spite of all its maidenly whiteness. The young girl's illuminated silhouette all at once seemed terribly shocking to her in its Venus-like beauty — (*Vénus sortant de l'onde*)—and with a short exclamation she too turned on her heel and, running up the steps to the esplanade, rapidly entered the château. Her brows were knit and the flame of indignation shone war-like in her eyes.

The way to her own domain led past the suite of rooms occupied by Laurence, and with perfect deliberation she opened the door of the boudoir off the sleeping-apartment and entered.

This suite, comprising a bed, dressing and bath room, besides the boudoir in question, was designated by the household as *la volière*; for the whole plan of decoration was based upon bird life. It had been a fantasy of a Marquise de Plenhôel, arriving as a bride there from the Court of Versailles, to evolve for her own personal use

MOONGLADE

this dainty retreat, so completely at variance with the grim fortress on the coast of Finisterre. She had been of a gay and witty spirit, had this pretty Marquise, and this was testified by the ingenuity with which these embellishments had been planned.

From the exquisite lampas covering the walls, where flights of winged things seemed alive amid branches of pale brocaded roses and apple-blossoms, from the curtains and portières of like material, the beautifully medallioned and painted ceilings, the pink-marble fireplaces and faintly gilded cornices, down to the very carpets, lounges, and chairs, birds and flowers were repeated in every imaginable hue and tint. Carved, embroidered, painted, and chiseled, the feathered tribes hovered between garlands of bloom as admirably preserved as if the hands of the artists had but just put the finishing touches to their gracious task. The inspirer of it all had died on the guillotine in 1794, but her pastel portrait hanging in the boudoir smiled the imperishable smile of an all-conquering loveliness and charm.

Her azure gaze, so proud and high-bred beneath the powdered and diamond-dewed waves of her coiffure, riveted Madame Hortense's attention, as it always did when her duties called her to that portion of the State Apartments. She paused before the cupid-wreathed frame, and gazed at the slender waist in the silk-and-lace corselet of a Court toilette; at the slim hands clasped over the nacre sticks of a *point d'Argentan* fan; at the trail of jasmine intermingled with strands of great pearls, crossing like the ribbon of some Order from the right shoulder to the left side of the cloth-of-silver girdle, and she sighed profoundly.

"*Ah! quelle pitié!*" she whispered, "*quelle pitié!*" Then, struck by a sudden thought, she bent swiftly forward. "How Marguerite resembles her!" she resumed, half aloud. "I had never noticed that before." And a shade of fear

MOONGLADE

darkened her own eyes for an instant. But she had not come to indulge in vain contemplations and vague forebodings. So, straightening herself, she cast a quick look about the room. Inside one of the window-places a Louis XVI. desk of celadon-green wood, inlaid preciously with more birds and flowers, had been left open. On the velvet-covered writing-board lay, in unpleasant contrast, one of those eminently durable and business-like blotting-books for which the world is indebted to England. Covered in pigskin, it displayed the large, flat monogram, L. S., in visibly extra-solid silver, while a fountain-pen of similar usefulness and practicality had been uncapped, in dangerous proximity to the softly faded lining of the desk.

If ever there existed a scrupulously honest and loyal woman, Madame Hortense was that one. Yet without any hesitation whatsoever she stepped to the window and resolutely opened the blotting-book. Between the rough leaves there was nothing save a few clear sheets of lavender-gray note-paper bearing the same letters, L. S., in violet and gold, and Madame Hortense let the covers fall together with some abruptness. She glanced into the immaculate depths of a beribboned basket near by, and was on the point of passing on into the adjacent bedroom when the violent stain made by a crimson-morocco volume on the pale loveliness of the room made her stop and take up the eye-offending object. "Scott's Poems, by Scott. For a good little girl," was the enlightening device she read on the fly-leaf, writ in an angular and manful, if not masculine, hand, and this was signed, "From Aunt Elizabeth." Madame Hortense lacked perhaps a keen sense of humor, but yet she laughed, and was about to thrust the double absurdity out of sight when it slipped from her fingers and fell with a crash to the floor, flying open as it fell, and flinging half a dozen sheets of the lavender-gray paper in as many different directions.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" quoth Madame Hortense in three

MOONGLADE

different tones, quickly picking them up. "So that's the letter-box, eh?"

She was a trifle short-sighted, and, holding the loose pages close to her eyes, began to read. She knew English very well, and followed without the least trouble the small, neat lines of script that were disposed to slant diagonally down the sheets toward the outer corners, and as she read her kindly features gradually altered into something almost approaching a tragic mask. When she reached the last word of two copious epistles she confided them once more to Scott's care, replaced his poems on the table where she had found them, and left the room with a curiously stiff gait, suggesting the *Statue du Commandeur* in "Don Juan."

"So," she thought, stalking wrathfully away, "Milady has a lover . . . an English lover—created by Divine Providence expressly for her, excepting that he is not rich—an officer in the Life Guards, poor fellow!" Pausing for an instant, she leaned against the stair banister to reflect the better.

"Also," she went on, mentally commenting, "she has a confidant—a cousin . . . *he* is in the Scots Guards—to whom she tells all her little plots! *Parfaitement!* Mademoiselle Seton is well provided so far. Add to this a millionaire Russian Prince anxious to become her prey, it seems, and an American youth also possessed of vast wealth, but, alas, untitled, who likewise is in love with her, and we have the situation clear as mud. A very pretty situation indeed! Quentin is really no fool!"

She shook her head dismally, disarranging thereby the spick-and-span neatness of her undulated *bandeaux* crowned by a bow of creamy lace, and sought her own rooms, resolved to watch minutely the sorry game that—chance somewhat assisting—had just been revealed, and which presented many hitherto undreamed-of but very dangerous possibilities.

MOONGLADE

She who was here to watch over little motherless Marguerite at once began to heap a thousand undeserved reproaches upon herself for what she termed her unpardonable negligence, and felt indeed that in the last half-hour she had become a sadder if a wiser woman.

CHAPTER IV

Ask; I will not deny, within the strength
Courage and Honor may descry in me.
Ask of my service to the utmost length
And I will give it thee.

MARGUERITE was sitting on the short salt-grass at the top of the *souffleur* cliff. Beside her was a large reed basket, half filled with *mousserons*—those toothsome little pale-yellow mushrooms that grow in perfect circles all over the table-land—perfect circles from which, however, one mushroom is always missing, because these erratic cryptogams appear only where the *Farfadets* (elves) have danced during the night, a member of their company lying on watch at full length upon the ground while they merrily disport themselves in an all but complete *ronde*.

The gray-green sward was still dotted with the quaint formation close to Marguerite, but she had stopped harvesting them, and sat idly—a strange thing for her to do—evidently absorbed in the evolutions of the gulls, which kept plunging headlong down to the blue waves, apparently for no other purpose than to fly immediately up again and preen their plumage in the veiled sunlight of the cliff-top.

There was an indefinite expression in Marguerite's attitude which had never been there before: not lassitude, not ennui, but a queer lack of that verve and elasticity hitherto one of her greatest charms. Her delicious face, so like the pastel in the boudoir of the *volière* suite, was

MOONGLADE

much as usual beneath the brim of her sailor-hat, her slim waist as supple, her shoulders as straight and well drilled as ever, and yet, and yet—?

Nobody had noticed any change in her, however, so change assuredly there could not be.

A quick step behind her made her turn and see Basil advancing in long strides from the "castle-path"—as the yard-wide track westward along the *falaise* is distinguished from the one in the opposite direction.

"Had a pleasant ride?" she queried, as he came up, instinctively making room for him beside her, as though there had not been mile after mile of room on both interminable stretches to east and to west.

"Yes," he replied, lowering himself to the grass at her side and pushing back his cap to let the strong sea-breeze cool his forehead. "A very nice ride. But why didn't you come with us, my dear little 'Gamin'?"

His dear little "Gamin" resumed her contemplation of the whirling gulls, her eyes averted from him.

"Oh," she replied, lightly, "I didn't feel like riding to-day. Besides, these mushrooms needed cutting."

Basil laughed. "A fine excuse!" he declared. "And as to your not feeling like riding, you who, so to speak, have been born on horseback—a little Centauress!"

He bent sideways to see her face, but she petulantly left a mere profile for his inspection.

"Oh, there's an eagle!" she exclaimed, pointing to a distant crag, where a solitary bird of great size had just alighted.

"An eagle! Yes, I think it must be an eagle," he amiably corroborated, without troubling to look in that direction. "Let him be; he is well enough there. Can't you be serious a moment, 'Gamin'? I want to speak to you."

His face was grave now, and the tone of his voice made her veer round with a sudden anxiety.

MOONGLADE

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"No, of course not . . . I only wish to . . . ask your advice about a personal matter. You are a very wise little person, sometimes, you know."

"Am I? It's the first time I hear of it!" she exclaimed. "It sounds very nice!"

"I'm glad it does, 'Gamin,' because it's the plain truth. And I am sorely in need of wisdom just now, having apparently none left of my own."

Marguerite laughed, and a quick blush followed the laugh.

"Set forth the case for judgment," she said, reaching to gather a dewy *mousseron* and tossing it negligently into the basket; but he suddenly caught her hand and held it tightly in his.

"Look here!" he pleaded. "I cannot speak if you don't keep quiet. What I have to say is not so awfully easy."

"It is serious, then?" she questioned, hesitatingly, her fingers remaining his willing prisoners.

"Very serious."

The "Gamin" slowly shifted her head, and her luminous eyes met his frankly.

"Speak then," she said in an odd voice, which seemed all at once a little strangled.

"Well!" Basil began. "Well—now supposing you were asked . . . would you . . . would a young girl like you find me too old to—to marry?"

Marguerite started and drew her hand firmly away. There was a silence during which the clamor of the gulls became enervatingly loud. A hurtling squadron of noisy birds swept over Marguerite's and Basil's heads, settled in disorder on the grass ten yards farther on, and instantly ceased shrieking.

"Well?" Basil, who had also fallen into a bird-study, resumed with an effort.

"Well, I told you so before. You are not so very old."

MOONGLADE

There was a pitiful little attempt at humor and lightness in the words. "I . . . you see . . . I was teasing you that day. . . . I was much younger then."

"Much younger," he expostulated, "four weeks ago!"

"Four weeks—is that all?" she wondered.

"Yes, just four weeks to-morrow. I remember because . . . never mind why. . . . But you have not really answered me." He recaptured her hand and pressed it. "Do, 'Gamin,' do, please say something encouraging!" he murmured, almost in her ear, and quite unconsciously drawing her toward him.

Her graceful body stiffened, and almost immediately relaxed again. The hand in his was trembling a very little.

"I think you would make a very nice husband," she said, innocently, not in the least aware of what she was saying.

A quick smile lighted up Basil's eyes. "You dear child!" he whispered. "You little darling!"

Marguerite sat quite still waiting—waiting for she knew not what; her heart beating so fast that she became afraid he might hear it. Fortunately more gulls were swooping up from below the giddy brink, and the surge of their wings made this improbable.

"Then you would not laugh at me if I were to ask you to—"

He paused, searching for the exact words he wanted, and Marguerite, her lips slightly apart, listened a trifle breathlessly. "To help me?" he concluded with unexpected force.

"Help you? How? What do you mean, Cousin Basil?"

She was desperately trying to conquer some unexplainable emotion.

"You see, I don't like to ask your father. He would begin by making fun of me!"

"Fun of *you*!"

MOONGLADE

"Oh, without a doubt! You know him, Marguerite." He had never called her Marguerite before, and she wondered why he did so now. "He is barely four years older than I am, you understand, and. . . ."

"What does that matter?" she interrupted, with a happy little smile. "He—"

She checked herself and hastily altered the sentence to a "He likes you very much, you know!" which was extraordinarily meaningless.

"And do you like me very much, too?" Basil asked, looking straight ahead in the eye of the wind. It was a pity he could not see her smile now, or the expression that accompanied the light casualness of her reply, for both were revealing.

"Yes; very much, Cousin Basil."

"I know you do, my dear little 'Gamin,' and that is what emboldened me to ask your advice just now."

He was still gazing out to sea, wrapped in his own thought, while she waited, a faint tingling in her fingertips warning her that her patience was really being tried. She moved restlessly once or twice, until finally one slender fawn-suède-shod foot hung directly over the knife-like edge of the cliff. In the offing a fleet of fishing-boats that from that height resembled a mere flight of red-and-white butterflies, were drowsily drifting under slack sails toward the harbor of Kastèllék, behind the crag where still sat enthroned the contemplative eagle.

Absently, mechanically, almost, Marguerite pulled from the rock-border of the salt-grass a fat stem of *perce-pierre*, and stuck it in her mouth. The juice of that briny plant—eatable only when steeped in vinegar—bit smartly into her tongue, but she did not even notice it, for she was watching Basil intently; his handsome profile, the deep-set gray eyes under their energetic brows, the obstinate chin, and clean-cut mouth by no means concealed by the short, light mustache which contrasted so happily with

MOONGLADE

the red-brown hair faintly limned with silver. Her cousin Basil! She was very proud of him. Was there any other man like him in the whole round world?

"I hesitate to ask you another service," she heard him say now, and with praiseworthy energy she roused herself.

"Don't hesitate, Cousin Basil!" she said, with a hint of shyness.

"Do you think you could manage to sound your friend's ideas on the subject?"

"My friend . . . the subject!" she echoed, blankly. Whatever doubt and surprise she might have felt before was transformed into complete puzzlement. She was coming back from so great a distance!

"Yes—your friend Laurence, of course! You see," he continued, more easily now that he had burned his bridges behind him—"you see, my 'Gamin,' ridiculous or not, my whole future life is centered upon her. I fell in love with her the minute I set eyes upon her, and if she refuses to marry me—"

With a wild scramble that all but threw her headlong over the precipice the "Gamin" jumped up. She was ashy white, and as he caught her—as it were in midair—he felt that she was shaking, literally from head to foot.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded, holding her tightly in his arms, as if afraid that she would try to escape. "Lord! how you startled me. What do you mean by dancing about like that in such a place!"

She saw that he was badly frightened, for his voice trembled as he spoke, and she disengaged herself quietly, and in a curiously calm tone apologized.

"I am very sorry, *mon cousin*. I hope you will forgive the scare I gave you," she said, simply.

"*Sacré*. . .!" The rest of the heartfelt string of ob-jurgations rising in his throat bumped against his teeth, and he swallowed it whole, so to speak. She had returned

MOONGLADE

a few paces, and, picking up her basket, was standing cold and pale as a lily, scanning the horizon.

"Plenhöel should hire a keeper for you!" Basil cried, with that vengeful irritation which invariably succeeds great frights. "You are not fit to be trusted out alone!"

"Thank you very much, *mon bon cousin!*" she said, with a little courtesy in his direction. "Not you, I hope, however. He might find you inadequate—and, besides, if you will now take the trouble to look yonder, behind the *menhir*, you will see Hortense Gervex dozing over her knitting. *She* is my keeper."

"A famous guardian!" Basil deprecated in disgust. "As a matter of fact you have jumbled my ideas so that I scarcely remember what I was talking to you about!"

"I do!" responded Marguerite. "I remember it perfectly, and, acting upon your recent request, I will try to find out what you wish to know, as soon as possible."

A quick suspicion, as fleet as the flight of an arrow, shot through Basil's heart. What was this in her voice, her manner, that seemed so queer? He turned and faced her in acute distress; but there she stood, apparently quite unmoved, in a perfectly natural attitude, both little hands clasped upon the handle of her mushroom-basket, and inwardly Basil wrathfully called himself an imbecile. That child—that mere baby—it seemed almost a desecration to have, even for a second, believed her capable of "grown-up" feelings. Ah! Yes, indeed, she was justly named the "Gamin," with her boyish, reckless ways, her laughter, her merry pranks. Poor dear little "Gamin."

They were walking side by side, now, in the direction of the *menhir*, to retrieve Madame Hortense, who, had they known it, was far from "dozing over her knitting," but wide awake indeed, very watchful, and gleefully imagining that things were going on quite satisfactorily between those two. Marguerite had refused to relinquish

MOONGLADE

her basket to Basil, and was swinging it carelessly by the handle as she advanced toward her governess.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she cried, making a trumpet of both her hands through the basket handle. "Time to go home, Hortense!"

Madame Hortense rose, methodically folded her work, and, coming on to meet them, fell in immediately behind on the narrow track. The grass for yards and yards was now covered with sitting gulls, forming a great restless carpet of living snow, while hovering above them, a host of late-comers violently protested against the pre-emption of what they naturally considered their own particular territory.

Marguerite and Basil, a mere half-head in front of Madame Hortense, were silent. Once she stumbled over a small stone, and laughed at her extraordinary clumsiness when Basil caught her by the elbow. But there must have been something odd in the timbre of that laugh, for Madame Hortense instantly ranged up alongside and gave her a quick, searching glance that Marguerite met with eyes as bright and hard as steel. As to Basil, he was again sunk in his own dreams, and Hortense resumed her former place with a puzzled sigh.

Leaving him on the *perron*, and Madame Hortense sitting unquietly on one of the terrace benches, Marguerite ran to the stables, ordered her favorite horse, "Gavroche," to be saddled at once, whispered a few words to the old *piqueux*, who always accompanied her when she rode without her father, and raced back with nervous speed to put on her habit.

Fifteen minutes later she was cantering across the heather toward the forest, with the ease of those who have begun this sport of sports as soon as they could stand on their feet, but with far from her usual pleasure. As she reached the first pines standing sentinel-wise at the limit of the *lande* the sun was just beginning its down-

MOONGLADE

ward course to the ocean-rim, and she realized with a certain joyless satisfaction that earth and sea would still for many hours be bathed in that rose-gold light, which, save on very few occasions, on hard midsummer or mid-winter days, is the veiled glory of Brittany.

Nobody at the Castle knew that she had gone out, for she had bidden Ireland, the *piqueux*, to wait for her in the "yard," where she had mounted "Gavroche," and now Ireland was following fifty paces behind on "Méssire-Antoine," the "worst-minded devil at Plenhœl" — as he was distinguished by his present gray-haired rider from a vast company of mettlesome thoroughbreds housed on three sides of the equine "yard," very much as the hosts of the château were lodged about the *Cour-d'Honneur*.

Bending her head beneath the sweeping boughs of the vanguard of trees, Marguerite galloped into a narrow sandy path padded with last year's pine-needles. She had adopted a pace that suggested flight from some imminent danger, some indeterminate presence that must be avoided at all cost. Her eyes had a fixed, harsh look that certainly had never sojourned there before, and the ungloved hands, tightened on the reins, had a grim expression all their own. "Méssire-Antoine," fired by the example of "Gavroche," gave Ireland some trouble to keep him at the regulation distance, so that this worthy began to wonder what ailed his young mistress. He, too, was an ancient servitor, a relic of the late Marquis, who when still a youth had brought him back from a hunting trip in Queen Victoria's dominions, and ever since then the man had remained at Plenhœl, well satisfied with his lot. It was he, as a matter of fact, who first had put Marguerite on a pony the size of a Newfoundland dog, settled her baby form in the little velvet chair on its back, and gradually taught her how to stick on something less easy. Curbing his evil-tempered mount, he now watched

MOONGLADE

the little figure ahead in the gray linen, close-fitting habit, the thick, fair hair clubbed low on the neck by a flat barret of yellow tortoise-shell, the trim gray sailor-hat tilted forward, and last, but not least, the absurdly small foot with its gleaming golden spur poised in the stirrup, *au ras de la jupe*. He smiled discreetly as he recalled the winning of that golden spur by "le Chevalier Gamin"—as her father had dubbed her from that day on. It was at a boar-hunt, when, out of a large assembly, she alone had arrived at the finish with the Master. She was only fourteen then, and, as it chanced, on sick-leave from her convent; but the spirit of all the past and present Plenhœls, their contempt of pain, their horror of ever being beaten, had flamed up in her, and the prize of that victory had been the little golden token of knighthood—not only because she had won, but because already then she was bent on always winning, on always being on time to prevent her dogs from being "unsewn" by their fierce quarry, at the kill.

Almost soundlessly the hoofs of "Gavroche" and of "Méssire-Antoine" flew along the felted forest-track, and not once did Marguerite slacken speed until the "*Carrefour*" of the "Seven Sages" was reached. Why the Seven Sages no one could tell, or had ever known precisely, but here it was at last, a little break of blue sky among the crowding tree-tops, a green island underfoot, luxuriously moss-carpeted all about a lofty throne-like rock indented by seven curious niches, which formed its exact center. Foxgloves in rich profusion proudly swung their chimes of pink bells beneath its craggy sides, and tall ferns of extravagant vigor grew in sturdy clumps here, there, and everywhere. Its towering grandeur made a new idea break upon the painful confusion of the young girl's thoughts, and she beckoned to Ireland, stopped, and, sliding to earth, stood holding out the reins to him with averted face.

MOONGLADE

"I'm going to the top of the rock while you walk them about," she said, shortly, and left him gravely alarmed, for he had never yet seen his gracious lady so very pale, or so abrupt and cold.

The top of the Throne Rock—something of a scramble to reach—was as flat as one's hand, and to the eye hard as only black basalt can look—and be; but Marguerite flung herself down upon it, nevertheless, and lay flat, her hands crossed behind her head, her eyes searching the pale-blue gulf above for the answer to her riddle, the soothing of her stormy reflections. She kept so still that a robin red-breast ventured himself close to her feet. He bent his head wisely, cocked a wary brilliant eye upon the shining rowel of her spur, advanced yet farther—near enough to peck the hem of her skirt—retreated with an impudent swelling of bright feathers, advanced again, and then with a comically disappointed mien flew up to the topmost branch of a slender birch hard by, and clung there, gazing down at her from that convenient height. Unfortunately, the wide-open eyes, with the faint azure rings beneath them, had no vision just then for the picture he made, with his scarlet breast and fluffy body boldly showing against a trembling spray of purest yellow, such as sapling trees sometimes bear among their summer foliage—a dignity beyond their age and strength, like a silver thread or two amid youthful locks, or a line of pain on a young face; while the sun went slowly on his way and the transparent shadows shifted across the fragrant glade.

For a long time Marguerite lay there motionless. She might have been carved from the rock itself, so little sign of life did she give, and when at length she rose, all of a piece—as was her wont—there was no longer any trace of emotion or chagrin on her charming little face.

"I'll sound her to-night," she whispered to the deep heaven above that apparently had given her the answer

MOONGLADE

she sought; and, climbing swiftly down, she rejoined Ireland with a "Let's gallop home, Irry," that instantly cheered and comforted her old retainer; for the voice and the manner were once more those of his "Chevalier-Gamin."

CHAPTER V

Fate plays no honest game, but when
You glance aside or back
She palms the discard slyly, then
Redeals it with the pack.

"PAPA," the "Gamin" said, "I wish we would not go to Paris this winter."

She was driving "Antinoüs" home from Châstelcoürt, the home of Comte René of that ilk, "Grand Louvetier de Bretagne," and she spoke lightly, all her attention being presumably devoted to the careful guiding of her pet trotters, "Scylla" and "Charybdis"—quite a job in itself, being given the tempers of the beasts in question.

"Not go to Paris?" "Antinoüs" asked in surprise. "Not appear during your first season before what is left of our world? Why, 'Gamin,' what can you be thinking of?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, excepting of what Monsieur de Châstelcoürt told you about the wolves in the mountains. It has been years—you heard—since they have been so numerous, which is not unnatural," she went on, jerking the storm-collar of her long fur-lined driving-coat up to her little ears. "Brr-rr-rr. It is cold . . . for Britany, that is!"

"Not down at Plenhœl!" "Antinoüs" argued. "Here in the foot-hills, all right; but there we have only rain and fog and squalls to our heart's content, which does not make for gaiety."

MOONGLADE

"Then you are not a real Breton, my father—dear!" Marguerite exclaimed, tickling with the bud the glossy hind quarters of "Charybdis." "Not a bona-fide son of the Celtic Sea," she resumed, restraining the antics of the deeply offended horse. "Oh, you needn't tug at your mustache! I am stating a fact."

"Antinoüs" turned and gave her a quick look, but all he could see was the half of her profile between her up-turned collar and the revers of her fur toque drawn down nearly to her brows. Her eyes were steadily fixed upon "Charybdis's" ears, this unregenerate miscreant being still somewhat resentfully inclined.

"Why don't you want to go to Paris?" asked the youthful father. "It is surely not only the chance of some wolf-hunting?"

Marguerite replied at once: "The wolves naturally have a great deal to do with it, but even barring them, I should much rather remain here—at home."

"Isn't the Hôtel de Plenhöel home, too? After all, it has been ours for many, many generations, which should lend it some of the charm that the old place here has for us. Besides, all our relatives and most of our friends are already in Paris, or will be there soon. Among others your beloved Laurence, who, by the way, is, as a Russian Princess, certainly an astounding success. Poor old Basil! I'll be glad to see him again, although I still can't help being sure he was a fool to marry her."

Of a truth "Charybdis" must have been in a sour mood that morning, for at this point he cut such a caper that "Antinoüs" interrupted his discourse to advise Marguerite to land her team in the ditch before worse happened, and have done with it! The sarcasm, however, apparently did not touch her, for she gave no sign of annoyance, and as soon as the horses had resumed a more dignified *allure*, he went on, quietly:

"They've been married nearly four months now,

MOONGLADE

haven't they? *Sapristi!* How time flies! A chance meeting . . . a hot-headed Muscovite . . . a level-headed Britisher, an infinitesimal courtship, a consent from the Czar, a splendid wedding-feast, a short trip to one's vasty estates, and here is our interesting couple royally established in the Faubourg St.-Germain, and cradled by the town of revolutions, where they will doubtless dominate *chic* and fashion. Ah, there's no denying it! Your Loris knows how to paddle her own canoe."

"You never did like Laurence!" Marguerite observed.

"No, I never did; I don't mind owning up to that; and the high-handed way in which she landed one of the greatest matrimonial prizes in Europe did not improve my admiration, either. A girl as competent as she proved herself to be before twenty promises for the future."

Marguerite was turning her horses from the departmental road into one which opened upon it at right angles, and made a short cut to Plenhœl across the heath. This delicate operation might, therefore, have excused her silence, but her father did not think so.

"Oh, hang it all, 'Gamin'!" he exclaimed. "You know what I mean, in spite of your sugar-candy airs! You won't tell me that you were pleased with her—or him, either, for the matter of that; else why did you refuse to go to the marriage on the plea of ill-health? You pleading ill-health! Preposterous! However, I thought that perhaps by now you had forgiven and forgotten, and that you might be pleased to see them once more."

Had her father looked at her now he would have noticed the wave of delicate color rising on what was visible of her face; but he was irritably drawing his cigarette-case from a recalcitrant inner pocket, and did not see.

"Forgive—forget? What in the world have I to forgive or forget, papa?" she asked, glancing at the somber dried heather rustling along both sides of the road into

MOONGLADE

misty distances. "What indeed; since it was I who at Cousin Basil's request first spoke to Laurence of his 'intentions' regarding her?"

"Antinoüs," a cigarette in one hand and a vesta-box in the other, veered abruptly in his seat, and stared at his daughter with something akin to consternation in his eyes.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Why I never heard a word of all this! What an idea, to make a baby like you his messenger, instead of asking me!"

"Well, he thought you'd laugh at him," Marguerite frankly replied.

"He did, eh? Jolly right he was, too, come to think of it. For that's exactly what I would have done, I dare say. A man like him to throw himself away for the sake of a pretty minx's bright eyes, and that, mind you, without knowing anything in particular about her."

"He was right to mistrust you, you see," she mocked.

"Yes, I see, but it isn't too late. I promise you that I'll do my laughing yet. Indeed, 'Gamin,' I hope you're going to reconsider that verdict about not going to Paris. It would annoy me very much to miss the fun."

For a minute Marguerite did not reply. Another brusque bend in the road lent her fresh reasons for not attending, but when she spoke it was in her usual tone of semi-banter.

"My dear papa!" she said. "If you are bent on amusement, amusement you must have! It is not for an old lady like myself to stand in the way of your giddy doings."

"*Chevalier*," "Antinoüs" interrupted, "you do not always observe the deep respect due to a parent, but I will not repel the hand you offer me in peace and amity. May these words be my guerdon! I was wondering whether you had some really serious reason for disliking to go. And here are our turrets pointing skyward over the pines,

MOONGLADE

so kindly let your estimable steeds have their heads. I am as hungry as a bear. Aren't you?"

"Very hungry," she replied, with the enthusiasm of a sailor accepting a glass of water on a cold winter's day. "By the way, when do you wish to leave Plenhœl?"

"As soon as you like . . . or can. The first week of January I think would be a fairly good time. Of course Christmas and New-Year are better spent on our own land. In spite of what you say, I am almost as Breton in heart and soul as you are yourself, *mon Chevalier*—take care of that stone near the clump of reeds yonder, "Scylla" seems determined to swallow it *en passant*."

"*Leurs Alteesses Sérénissimes le Prince et la Princesse Palitzin!*"

The gigantic footman sent these distinguished appellations down the room in the perfectly intoned accents of a *valet de grande maison*, without the slightest striving after bombastic effect, and Marguerite quietly rose from the place before the fire where she was entertaining some guests. It was the first reception given by the Plenhœls since their arrival in Paris, and the salons were crowded.

Slim and graceful in her simple white gauze dress, that fell about her like fluent frost, the young mistress of the house wore no jewels, a little branch of white heather alone defining the heart-shaped opening of the corsage. With a charming smile she advanced to meet the strikingly handsome couple that was focusing all eyes in this choice assemblage, and her voice was coolly gracious as she bade them welcome.

Laurence was even more beautiful—if that were possible—than she had been before her marriage. Her lithe shape seemed taller, and in her trailing gown of almond-green velvet, bordered with a fine rouleau of ermine, she had something decidedly queenly.

She bent as though to embrace her cousin by mar-

MOONGLADE

riage, but, though she could not have told how, found herself merely shaking hands with that erstwhile "dearest of all friends," who immediately turned to Basil, uttering a commonplace compliment of congratulation.

He was beaming with happiness, and when "Antinoüs," who had followed his daughter, added his felicitations to hers, he actually grew red with pleasure.

"Yes!" he said, exultantly, letting his wife and Marguerite pass on, and detaining "Antinoüs" by the arm. "Yes, I am a lucky dog! Look at her! Isn't she a marvel? Wasn't I right when I called her that long ago—and exquisite, my dear fellow, in temper, in manner—oh, in everything!"

Never had the Marquis de Plenhœl heard his kinsman express himself with so much warmth or at such length. Interested by this transformation, he glanced at the serpentine folds of Laurence's long train, coiling and uncoiling behind her as she walked beside Marguerite, and then back at the once taciturn Basil. He had always thought his cousin a trifle too unemotional, and an amused smile showed under his blond mustache.

"How ill we judge women at first sight!" he remarked, lightly. "D'you remember your first view of Laurence in that gorgeous storm at Plenhœl? Who then would have imagined—"

"Speak for yourself, Régis," Basil countered, hastily. "You were the one who found fault. I fell in love with her at first sight, I tell you. As to you, permit me to suggest that you were not using your habitual keenness of vision that morning."

"Perhaps! Perhaps! I always said, though, that she was a beauty, you remember, and now I'll improve upon that. Marriage decidedly agrees with her, and she has become absolutely superb."

Once more Basil flushed with delight, for his cousin's appreciation was not one to be disdained. "Isn't she?"

MOONGLADE

he said, with almost boyish pride. "But"—with a look of contrition and apology so sudden that it was almost ludicrous—"tell me, Régis, has the 'Gamin' really been ill?"

"Why?" questioned Plenhöel, utterly forgetting the excuse made for her non-appearance at the wedding, and instantly alarmed. "Don't you think she looks well?" All thought of banter had suddenly left him, and he involuntarily took a step toward the place where Marguerite was attending to her duties, presenting one guest after another to Laurence, and that with amazing ease for a girl not yet seventeen.

"She looks adorable, as usual," Basil said, slowly. "That goes without saying; but I don't know, she seems elongated somehow . . . not thinner . . . not taller, either; just a trifle more ethereal; more like a dream." He paused and fixed his deep eyes on his little comrade—as he had used to style her. "I left a sheaf of sun-rays, and find one made of moonbeams—no, a moonglade—that's the word—yes, that's the exact impression she gives now—a quiet, restful, lovely moonglade."

"You're getting positively lyrical," "Antinoüs" retorted, impatiently. "A moonglade, indeed! Why, she's as full of life as a two-year-old, and as jolly as a sand-piper. Idiot!" he was thinking to himself. "He's so absorbed by his new toy that he can't see straight any longer. Decidedly a man of one idea at a time!" And he invited his cousin to come and have a cigar in the smoking-room, with indifferently concealed irritation.

Meanwhile Laurence was enjoying to the full the success which she had encountered wherever she had gone since her marriage. From beneath her long, curving lashes she eagerly watched the effect she was producing, and her rather too small ears—a sure sign of selfishness—adorned with priceless pearls, were quick to catch the compliments upon her beauty that Marguerite was receiving.

MOONGLADE

"Délicieuse! Ravissante! Mais, elle est jolie comme un amour, votre cousine!" It was intensely enjoyable, this long-awaited manna bedewing *après-coup* the desert of her past life, so bitter and so humiliating when this ambitious woman looked back at it, now that she had arrived! No more *pronunciamientos* from Aunt Elizabeth, no more charity from splenetic Uncle Bob—ever grumpy when not aboard his beloved yacht. No! Laurence was her own mistress now, with power and wealth unspeakable at her command. She was beautiful; she was not quite twenty; at her feet knelt a man no less her lover because she was his by the imperial word of church and state—indeed, rather more so—being given Basil's peculiarly chivalrous nature, his blind passion for her. She had reached to-night the very apogee of all her earthly desires, and therefore that was naturally the moment for her to feel the blood crowd back upon her heart as a voice not heard for seeming ages spoke suddenly at her shoulder.

"Permit me, madame, to recall myself to your memory." The words were irreproachable, so was the attitude of the tall, good-looking soldier bowing low before her, but she could willingly have annihilated him then and there.

"Neville!" she cried, before recovering her presence of mind. "Captain Moray! How—how are you here?"

"As naturally as you are yourself—madame. I, too, have the honor of being counted a friend in this hospitable house. Moreover, I have just been appointed Military Attaché to the British Embassy here."

She winced. Good Heavens! What could they mean in England by sending this young man, of all people in the world, to Paris, where she, the Princess Palitzin, intended to make her home for several months out of every year!

"Indeed!" she said, with passably assumed indifference. "I congratulate you."

"Thank you! I am rather young for the post, of course, but my uncle . . ."

MOONGLADE

"It is always agreeable to have friends at Court," she retorted, and felt horribly vexed at the difficulty she experienced in giving vent to this platitude. She had much to learn, had this Princess out of a fairy-tale—not hardened as yet to the world's surprises, not controlled enough, alas! to dissemble convincingly the wild agitation his sudden appearance caused her.

Her Neville! The boy she had loved—as far, at least, as she was capable of loving. Her restless eyes scanned the flower-filled enfilade of salons, and dwelt for an instant upon her husband, who, with "Antinoüs" in tow, was returning from the smoking-room. Basil's personality was of those that impose themselves upon any *milieu*. Patrician to his finger-tips, elegant—in the delicate French sense of this word so misused by foreigners—a full head taller than most of the men there, he was a Prince to be proud of, a Prince Charming—as Marguerite had once called him—in every possible respect. Why then did she feel her throat contract at the realization that she was, after all was said and done, his irrevocably, and that Neville Moray was henceforth but a figment of the days that had gone?

Basil certainly dwarfed his neighbors; she could not help admitting it to herself; and yet the English guardsman was good to look at, too, and had, moreover, an advantage over him to-night—he was in uniform, the *soirée* being a semi-official affair—and to a woman a uniform always appeals, especially when worn by men as manly as Moray. To Laurence, so enamoured of pomp and show, it appealed doubly.

Fortunately for her, Marguerite came toward her at that moment. "Laurence," she said, "the Dowager would like to know you."

"The Dowager?" Laurence said, slowly, her lips still trembling a little.

"The old Duchesse de Montemare," the "Gamin" ex-

MOONGLADE

plained. "You know she is the arbiter *par excellence* of our coterie. Will you come and be presented?" Then catching sight of the Captain, she turned to him with a smile of welcome.

"Good evening, Captain Moray. I had not seen you enter."

"I have been trying for ten minutes to approach you, mademoiselle, but you were *quite* unapproachable," he explained, bending low before her. "I have, however, been happy enough to pay my respects to your father."

"Ah! Very well. Platnowsky is going to play for us presently. I hope you'll enjoy it. He has a positive genius for entrancing an audience, irrespective of nationality, creed, taste, or personal inclinations."

"Hm—he is not the only one," Neville said, softly, his golden-brown eyes lingering admiringly upon the exquisite contour of Marguerite's face and form. "Will *you* sing for us to-night, mademoiselle?"

"I! You are not thinking of what you say, *Capitaine*. I! Sing after Platnowsky's wonderful playing, and Señora Vizazona's folk-songs in A minor!" But an impatient touch on the arm made Marguerite turn and gaze at Laurence, who, with heightened color and a toss of the head that made the diamonds in her tiara sparkle furiously, was attempting to draw her away.

"I am waiting!" she said, shortly.

"*I almost waited* is how Louis-Quatorze put it!" rejoined Marguerite. "This sort of thing was managed better then." And with a nod to Captain Moray she preceded Laurence across the room.

"What an exquisite little creature!" mused Moray, as he watched her disappearing into the music-room. He drew a deep breath and made his way unobtrusively to a near-by embrasure, where the window-curtains hid him from sight. His disappointment in Laurence had been keen just now. A few words sent him before her marriage

MOONGLADE

had acquainted him with as much of the facts as she cared to reveal. He saw now before his eyes the lavender paper she always used, and the downward-slanting lines of violet ink closing with this characteristic sentence: "Beggars are no choosers. They do what they must. Pity me!"

From the shadowy corner where he stood, the new Military Attaché surveyed the brilliantly lighted salons with meditative eyes. He fell to wondering why she had written that hypocrite "Pity me!" Basil, still chatting with Régis de Plenhœl, was only a few feet away, and the watcher had to confess to himself that this handsome aristocrat—every inch a man—with the stars of some great Orders on his coat, his winning smile and high-bred bearing, was not to be classed with those whom a woman is very sorry to have married. Moreover, Laurence had been looking not only happy, but singularly triumphant, before his own appearance within her range of vision. Her exultant attitude, her sumptuous toilette, her regal jewels, did not frame somehow with the picture one makes oneself of a poor heartbroken creature—*vierge et martyr*—forced into a distasteful union; and for the first time his love and loyalty for her wavered.

Presently she came back toward the sofa where Basil and "Antinoüs" were established. She was leaning on the arm of an Ambassador, extremely young-looking for so weighty a distinction, who was obviously delighted with his present rôle as *cavalière-servente* to the most-looked-at woman in the room. Laurence, her pretty color heightened, her eyes sparkling with animation, was responding to his graceful compliments in faultless Italian, "flying her hands" as if really to the manner born. The two men on the sofa had risen, and the little group was now so close to Neville that he could hear every word distinctly. And suddenly through the archway of the music-room he saw Marguerite de Plenhœl standing by the concert piano, where Platnowsky had just installed himself, and

MOONGLADE

half unconsciously he took a step in that direction, putting aside the curtain, and standing for a second irresolute and half revealed.

Laurence's eyes, meeting his, changed to extreme harshness, and in a voice new to her audience—especially to Basil—she asked him to have their carriage called.

"Not before hearing Platnowsky!" remonstrated "Antinoüs." "He is the nail of the evening—and looks it," he added, indicating the interminable maestro, thin almost to emaciation, and topped by an exuberant mane of dull potato-colored hair, weeping-willowing across his melancholy brow. But Laurence was not attuned to humorous remarks just now, and with an impatient gesture she reiterated what might easily have been mistaken for a command, and encountered Basil's glance of astonishment with a frown.

"She is afraid of me," Neville thought, as with a bow he passed on toward the music-room. "Afraid of me! Can it be possible? What does she take me for?" He felt very unhappy, almost ashamed, and especially puzzled. What did it all mean? Could this haughty, overbearing woman be the same who in the grace of all her girlish beauty had spoken so tenderly to him on the moonlit lawns of Seton Park less than a year ago? He glanced helplessly around. Marguerite's white silhouette detached itself against the lemon-wood paneling of the great *salle-de-concert*, and toward Marguerite he went instinctively, like all those who needed comfort, or followed the search of the ideal.

CHAPTER VI

Persuade him—he is but a man—
When you have swung the lash above,
Annoyed and hurt him all you can,
That it was done for love.

IN the brougham taking them home at the stately speed of their Orloffs, neither Basil nor Laurence spoke. The distance was short, and in a few minutes the "*Porte s'il vous plaît*" of their imposing coachman resounded before the escutcheoned portals. The equipage turned into a closed court, stopped beneath the glass marquise, and the footman jumped to the carriage door at the precise moment that a *Suisse* of heroic proportions and dazzling baldric gave notice of their coming, by three short strokes of his halberd on the tessellated floor of the entrance.

Basil assisted his wife up the marble steps and, gently retaining her hand in his own, crossed the hall and ascended the great staircase with her. A double hedge of white lilac and narcissus lined the porphyry balustrade on either side, and somehow or other Laurence felt suddenly as if their heady perfume made her dizzy. She foresaw some sort of explanation between Basil and herself; she knew that her tone and manner had been unjustifiable, and false pride rose in her at the thought of being even ever so gently called to account.

Nevertheless, she let him accompany her to her own apartments without a word, and it was only when the door of the *salon d'entrée* had shut behind them that she at last opened her mouth.

MOONGLADE

"It was abominably warm at the Hôtel Plenhœl," she said, disengaging her hand and walking ahead of him into the adjoining boudoir, where she sat herself down in closest possible proximity to the brightly burning pine-cone fire.

Basil did not comment upon this curious inconsequence, but, bending, he deftly unfastened the clasp of her long blue-fox cloak, and let it fall in a heap on the back of her arm-chair. In spite of herself Laurence was ill at ease. She gave a little laugh, and began to unbutton her left glove.

"They are so old-fashioned, the Plenhœls," she said, without looking up. "One really thinks one is attending a reception at Versailles under Louis-Seize. *Did* you see the way that Duchesse de Montemare wears her hair? I really believe it must be rolled upon a cushion, like our great-grandmothers', and I'd swear it was powdered!"

Basil, leaning against the tall chimneypiece, was looking straight into the dancing pink flames.

"She is the greatest lady in France," he replied, "and as to the old-fashionedness of the Hôtel de Plenhœl, a noisily modern reception would clash with those antique ceilings and dignified *souvenirs d'autrefois*."

"Oh, I am not finding fault!" she interposed, somewhat hurriedly. Then, looking up into her husband's face, she saw there something that, oddly enough, made her suddenly determined to put him in the wrong. She was not going to let him reprove her, even tacitly—not she, indeed!

"Of course," she said, arrogantly, "everything at the Plenhœls' is bound to be perfection—at least in your eyes. Fortunately for me I am not as gullible as you!"

Basil turned a pair of sincerely astonished eyes upon her. For the second time in an hour he felt as a harmless traveler feels when, without warning, he faces a gun-barrel pointing at him from behind a bush. What could

MOONGLADE

be the matter with his sweet little wife? he asked himself. Perhaps she was ill! He had been annoyed and a trifle irritated, but at this thought he experienced a complete revulsion of feeling, and quickly came across to her.

"What is the matter, Laury?" he asked, tenderly. "Are you tired, my darling? You do not seem quite yourself to-night."

With a petulant gesture she turned away from him, tightening her hands upon the fan she still held. There was a tiny rending sound, and the delicate tortoise-shell sticks fell apart in her lap.

"Why, Laurence!" Basil exclaimed, and, stooping, he lifted her in his arms, sat down in her place, and, holding her like a baby, drew her pretty head to his shoulder. "My dear child!" he said, affectionately. "You *are* ill, and it is all my fault. I should not have allowed you to keep such late hours. Since we have been in Paris you have been constantly on the go. No wonder you feel done up."

The broken fan had slipped noiselessly into the folds of Laurence's train, and she struggled half up, as if to recover it; but he held her fast, and with a shiver of inexpressible rage she suddenly burst into tears.

Basil was nonplussed, but for a moment he continued to stroke her hair in silence. He was not an expert in the queer humors of women, like his cousin Plenhœl, but from his great strength he looked upon them one and all as children, capricious, easily moved to shallow depths of emotion, a little irrational, and always in need of tenderness, of protection, and of caresses. Therefore he bore himself wholly in accordance with this belief during this first difficult moment of their already prolonged honeymoon. She was unstrung, pettish, a little unreasonable, yes! but adorable as always. All she wanted was to be soothed, petted. He did not even mind the sharp points of her tiara, that at every nervous sob came unpleasantly

MOONGLADE

into contact with his chin and cheek. Let her cry herself out, poor dear; that was the best thing for her to do; and, of course, after the storm sunshine would follow! Every married man knows that! He did not question the sorrowfulness of those sobs; they were convincing enough to him.

"I have gone too far; I have offended him!" the silly woman—interpreting his silence wrongly—was thinking meanwhile, her face hidden on his breast. "What shall I do—how explain?" For in spite of herself she was more than a little afraid of him now. Gradually, scientifically, so to speak, she began to temper the pathetic signs of her distress; and at length she ceased altogether to cry, snuggling closer and closer to him, however, as a tired child does with its nurse after some great and exhausting emotion.

"Better now, sweetheart?" Basil gently inquired. "Look up a bit, and let us dry those naughty eyes. I don't want my beautiful wife to be disfigured by tears."

He suited the action to the words, raised her head as if it had been made of egg-shell china with one big, brown hand, and, possessing himself of the absurd morsel of lace she called her handkerchief, tenderly wiped very genuine tears of anger from her long eyelashes. Then he sat her up straight on his knee like a doll, and asked, smiling imperturbably:

"Tell me now, oh, Un-Serene Highness, what causes all this big sorrow."

The manner in which she lowered her eyes and pouted partook of nothing less than genius. Her white breast was still rising and falling charmingly in its frame of velvet and ermine, making the big octagonal diamonds hanging from her necklace throb with prismatic light, and altogether she was irresistible in her half-contrite, half-resentful mood.

"You treat me like . . . like a baby," she murmured,

MOONGLADE

pettishly. "And yet I am your wife, and I have my rights, haven't I?"

"Most decidedly!" he agreed, repressing a smile with difficulty. What was coming now!

"Well, then," she went on, twisting the little chain of decorations in his buttonhole between her slim fingers, "why should I not feel hurt when you show me, so *very* rudely, that I am not first in your thoughts?"

Basil, greatly amused, laughed outright. "So, so!" he said, gaily. "You have discovered all by your own wee self that you are not first in my thoughts! What a clever little woman it is, to be sure! Especially under present circumstances. You should be mightily proud of such a painstaking and praiseworthy achievement."

"You can laugh!" she cried, leaping from his knee and confronting him, her cheeks flaming with real indignation. "You can laugh as much as you please, but I'm not laughing . . . not laughing at all, I assure you . . . nor would you if you knew how you have offended and affronted me."

"Is this serious?" Basil asked, getting to his feet after one painfully astonished glance at her. "A joke must not be carried too far, you know, my dear."

Laurence blushed crimson. She was as yet a novice at such a game, and her lord and master looked extraordinarily imposing, towering there in that *bijou* room, walled and ceiled with white plush, like an *écrin* made to hold a pearl. For the first time she saw new possibilities in him, and a cold shudder ran down her back. Was she to resort again to tears, she quickly reflected, or was it wiser to fight the matter out, and obtain the mastery, now and at once?

"Are you serious?" he repeated, sternly enough now; and she winced.

"Quite serious," she murmured, trying to steady the trembling of her lips. "It is sickening to see you lost

MOONGLADE

in admiration before your cousin and everything your cousin does."

"Régis? In admiration before Régis?" he queried.

"You know very well I don't mean Régis—I mean Marguerite—your precious 'Gamin.' The '*Chevalier Gamin*,' as her foolish father and you call her."

Basil stepped nearer to her, put the tips of his fingers on her shoulders, and turned her face to the full glow of the wax lights burning in tall candelabras near by.

"What do you mean, Laurence?" he said, quietly. "Is it that you are jealous of Marguerite de Plenhœl?"

"Yes," she admitted, attempting to shake him off, but without avail, for although he did not exert the least pressure, she knew that she could not rid herself of those well-controlled fingers which nevertheless weighed so little that she scarcely felt their touch.

"You don't know me yet! I am jealous by temperament; jealous, of course, especially of you; of every word you speak to another, of every look, of every gesture! I can't help it; I am built that way, I suppose." She raised her large, resentful eyes to him so suddenly that he let go his delicate hold and remained gazing at her in helpless wonderment. Did she mean what she said? It was difficult to doubt that she was in earnest, but so ridiculous was the charge she made that his face grew grim.

"If this is the truth," he said, slowly, "I am extremely sorry for it. Jealousy not only denotes an entire lack of confidence and trust in oneself and another, but an inordinate amount of vanity."

"I dare say," she interrupted, sulkily, backing away from him. "But you cannot change me. I am as I am."

"Look here, Laurence," he said, gravely. "Assured of my love as you are, you cannot be really jealous. Surely I have given you no reason, be it ever so slight, for feelings that are so unworthy of you?"

MOONGLADE

Her brows met in one straight line above a pair of eyes in which there appeared for a second a sparkle of hatred.

"Well, then, if you love and adore me as you say you do, you might show me more consideration. To begin with, I will not tolerate your attentions to stupid *ingénues*, nor hear you praise 'greatest ladies'—as you call them—to my face. I know you have made a sacrifice in marrying me, since I brought you nothing but myself; but as you have done so, I suppose you'll have to abide by your bargain, such as it is."

Leaning against a table, both hands grasping its edge behind her, she was absolutely glaring at him, courting a quarrel with all her might, and a dreary sensation of pain and bewilderment overcame him.

"So!" he said at length, in a voice that shook a little. "You are offended because to-night I spoke to a little girl of my family—a child I have known since she was born—and ventured to praise a woman worthy of all reverence and old enough to be your great-grandmother! Well, this being the case, my dear Laurence, I can only ask you what you wish me to do in the future to please you. Remember that I love you with all my heart and soul, and that I am an honest man determined to make you happy at all costs. Now speak, please."

She, however, did not do so. As a matter of fact, she had by now worked herself into such a fury that she no longer quite knew what she was doing. She vaguely felt that she was acting like a fool. Yet she could not master an intense desire to hurt him, if she could only do so.

"Please, Laurence," he reiterated, looking miserably across at her, "do not mar our happiness by so uncalled-for a scene! If you but knew how you hurt me—what you are to me—you would not act like this!"

But she kept silent still, and, enervated beyond measure, he reached her in one stride, snatched her up in his

MOONGLADE

arms, and crushed her passionately to him. There was a moisture in his eyes that he did not care to let her see.

"Laury, my little Laury!" he murmured, shakily. "What is the matter with you to-night? Be honest with me at least, and tell me the real truth, instead of keeping me guessing like this!"

She swayed limply in his arms, unresistingly, as utterly irresponsible as a cushion of down, her head drooping, her whole body relaxed; and he bent quickly, thinking that she had fainted. But, no, her eyes were wide open, her face set in extravagant obstinacy; and the feeling of utter helplessness which strong men well know who have been confronted by the *Ewig-Weibliche* when at its worst wrung his soul. What could one do against this passive force of a being so delicate and frail that one could crush it between two fingers almost, and yet did not dare even to scold for what might, after all, be the mere childishness of a spoiled beauty?

This plea of sudden jealousy on Laurence's part was so absurd, so lacking in all foundation, that he really did not know what to think. Was it a clumsy excuse, perhaps, to conceal a fit of . . . of temper? Surely his Laurence, his beloved Laurence, so angelic until now, could not possibly have a temper to conceal! Concealment and her frank little self should not even be mentioned in the same breath. These reflections only lasted a few seconds, but during that short time Laurence, satisfied by the evident success of her armed reconnaissance, had cast about for some means of escape from the *impasse* in which she had so stupidly placed herself, thanks to that upsetting encounter with Neville Moray, and had come to a decision.

In another moment she straightened up, dabbed her now perfectly dry eyes pathetically with her handkerchief, and, gliding from Basil's grasp, began to look contrite.

MOONGLADE

"I'm sorry to have been so bad!" she murmured, piteously. "I don't know what possessed me . . . for, really, I don't have those naughty fits often!"

Instantly Basil cast behind him all that had taken place. She *was* a child, he told himself. Nothing but an impulsive, as yet immature creature, charming and wayward, whom he loved with a great love. What mattered a little cloud in a sky hitherto so pure? Surely he had been in the wrong to take the affair so seriously. He would have done much better to laugh it away, and thus did he begin to laugh and pet her, a change of front which she submitted to with seraphic patience, especially as he promised her—to commemorate their first little dispute—a wonderful bracelet of uncut sapphires she had admired that very morning in the rue de la Paix. What will you? Children must have toys and bonbons to console them when they cry.

A little later, when he had rung for her women, Basil went to his study. It was dark, save for the fire-glow, and he did not trouble to turn on the lights, but stood a long time at a window overlooking the garden behind the house. It had been freezing very hard for Paris—this particular winter being of unusual severity. Every tree, every branch, gleamed in crystal purity. The lawn, which earlier had been powdered with snow, glittered like a carpet of diamonds, and the hundred ramifications of a leafless aristolochia on the end wall made a twinkling lace-like tracery, interspersed here and there with broad frost-roses and ice-flowers against the dark stone. Above this fairy spot the sky was sown with stars, only a little paled by the cold radiance of the full moon.

A growing longing for his own land gradually stole over Basil as he stood there motionless. He drew a deep breath of regret as he called to mind the enchanting nights on the Neva; the music of sleds, the silky slide of sleigh runners, the fitful waves of the Northern Aurora rising

MOONGLADE

and falling like a softly moving curtain behind the towers and domes of snow-hushed St. Petersburg.

Until then he had not paused to think about the change that had come over his life. It had all been done so swiftly. Dazzled by passion, he had never paused to reflect that he was binding himself to a being of another race, another creed, another world, so to speak, and that such a step might bring about unforeseen and very grave difficulties. She had been so docile, so very anxious to please him during their brief engagement. Without a murmur she had abandoned the old faith of her people, for Greek Catholicism. She had accepted—in theory, at least—with touching self-forgetfulness, the heavy duties devolving upon the consort of a great territorial lord responsible for the welfare of the hundreds and hundreds of retainers and dependents upon his large estates, in villages and small towns lost in the immensity of the steppes, the depths of the boundless forests; and she had seemed to fully understand the heavy cares resulting from immense wealth, when that wealth is not looked upon as a mere personal benefit, but as a terrible responsibility for which account must some day be rendered to One watchful of His creatures and their deeds. Deep below the Russian earth labored miners whose task it was to bring to the surface gold and platinum, gems and malachite and lapis lazuli to fill the Palitzin coffers. Vast reaches of field and furrow, of forest and vineyard, were worked by erstwhile serfs of that princely house, in order to fulfil the same purpose. Thousands of horses and cattle were tended upon the plains by troops of herdsmen wearing the emblazoned *brassard* of Basil-Vassilièvitch Palitzin—the present master of half a province or so—and, strange to say, none were malcontents; for their lord treated them well, and had made himself well-beloved during the years of his stewardship. And now what of the Princess who was to rule at his side? The question was late in coming

MOONGLADE

to his mind. Well-born, well-bred, well-educated, she assuredly was. Why should she not be the absolute partner of his thoughts, his ideals, his plans—and they were many? But would she be that? He passed his hand slowly across his forehead, and relapsed into contemplation of the miniature Muscovy gleaming beneath the moon at his feet and islanded amid the great capital of France.

Paris with its round of gaieties, its music and laughter, and republican irresponsibility! Paris, the paradise of strangers from all parts of the globe; Paris, that from a thorough Anglomaniac had changed with startling rapidity into an Americo-lunatic; Paris, who threw wide her portals to every moneyed invader that chose to come her way, and gave him in return the tinsel-glitter and costly viciousness prepared for his or her reception, guarding jealously out of sight whatever remained truly French and truly decent within her walls, so that none could truthfully speak well of that famous modern Babylon. Basil smiled a little bitterly as his thoughts ran on thus. London, Berlin, New York—he knew them well—were wiser far than Paris. They did not flaunt their evil in the face of visitors, not they! They hid it scrupulously under the thick mantles of variegated religions, suited to every taste and class. Human failings, frailties, and worse than frailties, were shut in hidden places there, guarded by solemn-faced warders who denied their very existence and profited by their remarkable vivacity. And Petersburg—once again Basil's mind flew back to his own dear capital city, where failings and virtues run neck to neck, and elbow to elbow, in supreme carelessness of consequences, but at any rate without either effrontery or hypocrisy—just like Vienna, only more so!

Laurence loved Paris. It was she who had hinted, in her pretty girlish way, at a speedy installation there, where she knew so many people—friends of her uncle and aunt,

MOONGLADE

acquaintances made during her stay at Seton Park; Wiltshire, and Seton House, Belgravia; her summer cruises on the *Phyllis*; her short sojourns with Uncle Bob and Aunt Elizabeth at seaside or mountain resorts. Before these she ardently desired to appear in her new *Glanz und Pracht*, these who had seen her in the character of a dependent—and what a bounty that had been! But what did Basil know about these little secret plans? What indeed! He had found it quite natural for a young girl, full of life and of the joy of life, to want to spend her first married winter in the city of worldly pleasure *par excellence*. At that moment, however, he began to question the wisdom of his having so readily assented to her wishes. He felt that it might have been better for him to have done otherwise, to have begun by making her thoroughly acquainted with her adopted land, her adopted nationality, her new hereditary dignities and duties. Yes, the welfare of his own people was dear indeed to him, and a flying trip to his chief estate, where she had been greeted and fêted like a young queen, served but little to initiate her to what his life among them, as their suzerain, had really been.

With a puzzled frown he leaned his head against the cold glass. "We belong," he mused, "to utterly discrepant generations. I am so irredeemably slow and old-fashioned; she is so intensely modern!" He gave his shoulders a shake of dissatisfaction at these shortcomings of his. Then he began to pace moodily back and forth before the huge fireplace. "Oh yes," he reflected, sadly, "I suppose I will always be saying and doing things she will instinctively dislike and resent, and if she really is of a jealous disposition—" He stopped, pulled fiercely at his mustache, and resumed his paces and his futile cogitations until his brain grew tired.

Truly this night's unfortunate events had suddenly disclosed to him an altogether undreamed-of horizon line, and it was difficult to see what lay concealed beyond it.

MOONGLADE

Assuredly Laurence, had she but known it, would have done better to put her hand in the fire, than to shake even by the lightest possible touch the splendid monument of love and trust Basil had built up for her with so great a joy and so great a faith.

Weary, both morally and physically, he at last went back and gazed out into the garden again. Strangely enough, the image of the "Gamin," in her diaphanous white dress, with her sparkling blond hair aureoling her little head, suddenly appeared before him with startling reality. Her blue eyes seemed to gaze deep into his, and somehow she was no longer the playmate of other days, the merry child who had run and danced with the wind along the terrace at Plenhœl, who had struggled with the window-fastenings, and climbed to the box of the drag bringing Laurence that fateful morning, but a being wholly different; a sorrowing woman developed to her uttermost possibilities in a few hours, a woman possessed of the wisdom of all the ages, a friend in all the potency of the word—a counselor—more, even more than that—some one to look up to and gain endurance and patience from. Involuntarily he drew closer to frosted pane, and, looking out upon the softly gleaming moonshine by which he had symbolized her that evening, it seemed to him that her spirit was dowering the night with all its enshrined loveliness and shrouded mystery. Well! There would never again be the same ease and comradeship between them as before Laurence had committed the folly of naming her as a rival; but did this foolish act break the sweetness of the past, or perchance lend a new enchantment to the power of a personality Basil had not been clearly conscious of until this moment? He drew away from the window, determined to cut short such a train of thought now and for all time. He must be thoroughly out of sorts himself, he argued, and Laurence had been silly to speak as she had done—not quite as distinguished in manner as he

MOONGLADE

had fancied her to be! The women of his class, of course, were perfectly capable of fierce jealousies, yet *they* were bred and born to keep such feelings to themselves. It was part of their *métier* as great ladies. Still, his wife was now one of them; she would be taught by example the unspoken etiquette of their decorous world. Besides, he was not the sort to give her cause for jealousy; also he would, as far as he was able, avoid meeting Marguerite. Yes! Yes! Everything would turn out all right—and in the morning—the morning— He glanced at his watch by the last leaping flames of the crumbled logs—surely it must have stopped—or else hurried on without rhyme or reason, for it pointed at six o'clock. Guiltily he stole back to the window and stared at the garden below. All was so very still there—the sapphire-and-silver winter night as yet undisturbed—but as he bent closer he saw that ever so cold and faint a pallor was stealthily clouding its depth, its serenity, and with a quick, impatient sigh he sought his own room.

CHAPTER VII

The sea, the wind, the call of birds,
The leaves that whisper, brooks that run,
No song is ever void of words,
To hearts that beat as one.

SIR ROBERT and Lady Seton were passing through Paris on their way to join the *Phyllis* in Mediterranean waters. They intended to cruise along the African coast, putting in a few days at Algiers, a week or so in Alexandria, and then go on to the Bosphorus, which possessed the charm of mirroring on its gracious bosom the minaretted city where a first cousin of "Uncle Bob" was representing his country at the Padishah's Court.

The middle-aged couple were for the time being at the Meurice, occupying a suite of rooms replete with every comfort, and were at that very minute enjoying a thoroughly English breakfast in their sunny private dining-room. No such kickshaws for Uncle Bob as foamy chocolate and golden-coated rolls light as muslin, but soles fried in torment, with an accompaniment of oysters, truffles, mussels, and a seasoning of white wine; a portentous steak, humpbacked and juicy—as every self-respecting beefsteak should be—an omelette rouged into the semblance of a modern beauty by its filling of tomatoes, not to mention several other odorous trifles in the shape of grilled sardines and deviled kidneys.

Lady Seton was already armored from head to foot in well-cut serviceable tweeds, similar in texture and color to those which adorned her lord's portly form. She believed in frilly dressing-gowns and coquettish morning

MOONGLADE

coiffures no more than did Sir Robert in over-dainty breakfasts. Solidity, in costly disguise, was what they both preferred.

Ensconced behind the pages of the *London Times*, Sir Robert was seated squarely before his well-filled plate, and while perusing the news of two days before with the greatest interest, methodically carried his fork to his mouth, and back again for fresh supplies. His wife, without sparing herself a bite, was getting through a pile of letters just arrived, leaning each one in turn against the toast-rack as she read, while "Lady Hamilton"—a sadly obese toy spaniel, and her mistress's darling pet—sat gravely on a cushioned chair beside her, gloating with all her large, moist eyes over a near-by dish of cake.

"The Prime Minister," Sir Robert remarked, in an aggrieved tone, "has put his veto upon the interference of Great Britain in—" He glanced round the edge of the paper, noticed his wife's total inattention, murmured to himself something concerning feminine frivolity, followed by a grumbled conjecture as to whether the Premier realized that he was a public servant, or imagined himself the autocrat of all the Englands, and finally relapsed into ominous silence.

Just then a servant, so prehistorically dignified as to suggest the Stone Age, moved noiselessly from the door to Sir Robert's elbow, where he stood like a statue, disdainful of employing the typical "cough-behind-the-hand" manner of disclosing his presence, until the shadow of his admirably nourished body falling athwart the sacred pages of the *Times* did this for him.

"What is it, Berkley?" Sir Robert asked, testily; he abhorred being disturbed at breakfast. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"No, Sir Robert—that is, yes, in a way, Sir Robert; there is a—er—gentleman to see you, Sir Robert, in the reception-room."

MOONGLADE

"A gentleman to see me in the reception-room at eleven o'clock!" Sir Robert exclaimed. "Did he send up a card?"

"No, Sir Robert, leastways not that I know of. The chasseur down-stairs"—Berkley was no French scholar—"sent up the name only, by the page."

"Well—confound it!—what is the name?"

"Mr. Preston Wynne," Berkley stated.

"Young Wynne! God bless my soul! Why didn't you say so at first? Show him up immediately, Berkley. Why, you've seen him fifty times at Seton Park. Show him up—of course if you don't mind, my dear," he concluded, addressing his wife, who nodded consent without discontinuing her reading.

In a moment Mr. Preston Wynne was warmly shaking hands with Sir Robert, after which he reverently touched the extended tips of Lady Seton's fingers, bowed, and accepted a chair facing the one where "Lady Hamilton" was now enjoying the audible slumber of the corpulent.

"I hope I am not too early," he said, beamingly. "You know I wanted to catch you before you left the hotel for your constitutional, Sir Robert. I remember your habits, you see!"

"Not a bit too early, my dear boy," Sir Robert said, with unwonted geniality. "I did not know you were in Paris, though. When did you arrive?"

"Oh, a week ago or thereabouts. Grandma Wynne was set on being here for Ethel's wedding, and so I brought her over. She's the most indefatigable old lady in Christendom!" he concluded, with a laugh that revealed a double row of strong white teeth as regular as if they had been carved by machinery.

He was what Aunt Elizabeth called "a very personable youth," was this well-bred transatlantic, not very tall—say five foot nine—but well built, well groomed, well dressed, and with a pair of keen, gray-green eyes, and a

MOONGLADE

sleek head of pleasingly red-brown hair. Moreover, being the only son of a many-sided father, who had added greatly to a vast inherited fortune by old-fashioned and unexceptionable means, he was of some weight in the cosmopolitan world of the day, amid which he moved at ease and with a delightful buoyancy. He had met the Setons at Villefranche a couple of seasons earlier, and, extraordinary to record, had found such favor in Aunt Elizabeth's eyes that an invitation to shoot at Seton Park had followed. It was there that he had met and fallen in love with Laurence, to whom he had proposed. That young lady, dazzled by his wealth, his prospects, his father's magnificent steam-yacht—anchored at the time in the Solent—and perhaps attracted also by the young man's inexhaustible good temper and humorous aplomb, had been on the point of accepting him. Her infatuation for Neville Moray had, however, stayed her on the brink of a very desirable union. But she had, nevertheless, left him sufficient hope for the future to make the announcement of her marriage to Basil a very great surprise indeed. In spite of this he did not seem particularly broken-hearted this morning, as he sat in the full light of the windows smoking one of Sir Robert's best smuggled cigarettes. Lady Seton had retired to put on her hat, and the two men were alone.

"Have you already seen my niece?" asked Sir Robert, who (it may as well be admitted at once) could never face a situation of any awkwardness without immediately feeling called upon to put both his large, well-shaped feet through and through it.

"Yes, at a distance," Wynne replied, blowing three successive rings of blue smoke in front of him, and with such dexterity that they interlocked and floated away amiably linked to one another.

"The day after my arrival I saw her driving in the Bois wrapped to the eyes in amazing sables, and behind

MOONGLADE

a pair of Orloffs that made my mouth water, I assure you. Two nights later I glimpsed her at the opera wearing a diadem and triple necklace of rubies and diamonds fit for an empress. But in neither case did she appear to recognize my humble personality."

Sir Robert shook his head gloomily. "I am afraid," he remarked, "that she is having her brain turned by the adulation with which she is surfeited. Personally, I wish she had married you instead of Prince Palitzin, although I am bound to state that he is a fine man, and has behaved toward her with the utmost generosity."

Preston Wynne half rose, put his hand on his heart, and bowed with gay appreciation of the compliment.

"I am," he pronounced, "flattered indeed that you should have been inclined to prefer me to one of Europe's greatest personages. But, frankly, I cannot understand why you ever did such a thing."

Sir Robert smiled. He possessed, alas! no sense of humor whatsoever, but somehow or other he liked what he termed the quaint ways of this youthful friend.

"Laurence," he proceeded to expound, "is a curious girl. Not English in the least. Of course you know that we are one of those Catholic families who have never given up the 'Old Faith,' but that has nothing to do with it. Our blood is British—just so—and where that child has fished her very peculiar characteristics from is more than I can explain. At any rate, she was never quite one of us—as I frequently tell her aunt—a regrettable circumstance. She might have made *you* a good wife. You are a sensible chap, you see, who would stand no nonsense, I'm sure. But Prince Basil is quite another affair. He belongs to that class of foreign nobles whom we cannot help but admire, insular though we may be, but who should decidedly wed their own women; admirable creatures; trained to suit them and the high position they occupy. Between you and me, my dear fellow, the

MOONGLADE

feminine portion of our Anglo-Saxon race is rapidly becoming too emancipated, too free and easy, too assured of what they are pleased to call their rights—an attitude, let me add, which will gradually lead to the disclassing of the higher orders. It has already begun to do so, and soon the British great lady of old will have totally disappeared. Indeed, we have examples. . . .”

“*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!*” the American quoted to himself, continuing to follow his host's arguments with a profound and most flattering solemnity of aspect.

“Examples,” Sir Robert continued, “which have shown us that blue blood no longer counts for much; that, in short, coronets, time-honored and valiantly won in the glorious past, can be doffed in favor of the red cap of revolution,—sporting on the tail of a cart, whence their fair wearers shriek themselves hoarse in the unwashed cause of Socialism.”

Mr. Wynne, still listening politely, was beginning to wonder where Sir Robert was heading.

“Yes,” he put in, dubiously—“yes, of course you are entirely right, but your niece is scarcely of the kind you refer to, and she will without the possibility of a doubt grace the high estate in which she now finds herself. She very naturally preferred becoming a Serene-Highness to being plain Mrs. Wynne of Nowhere in particular; and who can blame her? She was born to the purple; one can see it at a glance.”

Sir Robert rose, walked over to the fire, planted himself on the rug, and, with both hands under his coat-tails, surveyed the speaker.

“I'm glad to see you take it like that!” he stated, thinking within himself of Neville Moray's visible melancholy when he had met him at a levee some two weeks after Laurence's wedding. “There's never any use,” he resumed, “in crying over derailed love-affairs, and this

MOONGLADE

being so, I wish you'd come and dine with us here to-night. You'll meet the Palitzins and some Breton friends of Laurence's, the Marquis and Mademoiselle de Plenhöel. They are near relatives of Prince Basil, and it was at their château in Brittany that Laurence first met her husband."

Wynne rose and drew on his left glove before answering. He wanted just that infinitesimal space of time to make up his mind, and when he had accomplished this task the trick was done.

"Thank you very much, Sir Robert. I'll come with pleasure if you'll let me," he said, smiling. "Good morning, Lady Seton. I'm off!" he added as, turning, he found himself face to face with her fur-wrapped figure. "Sir Robert has been good enough to invite me for to-night, and so, as the saying is over here, '*Au plaisir, madame, de vous revoir.*'"

He was gone, and in all the majesty of her matronly disapproval Lady Seton bore down upon her husband.

"I am amazed at you, Robert, really amazed! What could induce you to invite that poor young man with Laurence and Basil? I trust you may have thought of asking Captain Moray to be here also. It would really insure the success of the party!" she concluded, sarcastically.

Sir Robert's Olympian brow reddened—his brow always became Olympian the moment his wife appeared upon the scene.

"You are wholly correct," he said, stiffly, "for that is exactly what I have done!"

Lady Seton raised her muff toward heaven—a painted one, with a Greek key pattern and cupids disporting themselves among roses in merry French fashion—let the muff sink to the level of her somewhat flat waist, and sat abruptly down on "Lady Hamilton," who awoke with a smothered groan of surprise and pain.

"My Heaven! What have I done?" shrieked the lady,

MOONGLADE

getting on her feet again with surprising agility. "Oh, my poor, poor lovey!" she moaned, hugging the fat, wheezing little dog to her fur bosom. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Stop that nonsense, Elizabeth!" Sir Robert, more Olympian than ever, reproved her. "You couldn't hurt the brute if you tried. Why, she's like a feather pillow—most unsportsmanlike to overfeed her as you do. And now please attend to me," he continued, austere, easing with a square-toed finger the uncompromisingly angular collar around his neck. "I asked Moray, as I told you, and now I've asked Wynne to dine—that's an accomplished fact. But what I wish to impress upon you is that, Princess or no Princess, I don't propose to be made to feel like a child in my own house." He cast a masterful look at the topsy-turvy cupids gamboling above his head, but did not trouble to smile at the idea of having claimed them and the attached hostelry as his own. "If Laurence has so little tact and monde as to be annoyed because she meets her old flames at our table, let her be annoyed; I don't care a fig about it. So that's clear, is it not?"

He set his foot with an air of extreme finality upon the hearth-rug, volte-faced, and strode to the door to meet his hat, coat, and cane in the hands of the rigid Berkley; leaving his wife, in one of her most acid moods, to follow behind.

The dinner-table that night was set with all the luxury that money can suggest to French taste, and it was difficult to realize that the silver and crystal, the porcelain and flowers, had not been preordained and arranged by the especial orders of a distinguished hostess. As Sir Robert said, condescendingly, "They manage these things very well in Paris." Contrary to what Lady Seton had anticipated, a cheerful merriment held the guests from the moment they sat down, and soon the conversation—never failing in genial humor—actually rose to the higher level of wit. This was due chiefly to Basil and to young

MOONGLADE

Wynne, who seemed—much to Laurence's annoyance and surprise—to hit it off from the first. Lady Seton, usually what her husband described as a "damper," became as nearly responsive to the pleasing atmosphere of the occasion as was possible for her to be, while Sir Robert, to everybody's astonishment, plunged headlong—after the fish—into excellent yachting anecdotes. Tubbed and razored, and shedding cheerful waves of bay-rum and hair tonic about him, his ample shirt-front embellished by two large pearls gleaming like moons through mist, he expanded more and more as the well-conceived menu fulfilled its alluring promises, and cast glances of roseate satisfaction around the board. "Elizabeth is a fool!" he commented, inwardly. "They're all enjoying themselves like periwinkles at high tide. . . . By the way, she's got herself up to his Majesty's taste, has Elizabeth. She's positively scratched five years off her age." And so she had. For on occasions of ceremony, in spite of her Galliphobe tendencies, Lady Seton knew not only how to buy, but how to wear a Parisian gown of the best Place Vendome make, besides which her neck and arms were still more than presentable, and her jewels magnificent. Had there possibly lurked in her mind a desire to eclipse Laurence's bridal splendors? But who is to gauge the possibilities of a feminine brain, old or young? At any rate, to quote Sir Robert, as far as "get up" went, she was easily ahead of her niece by several lengths; for the faint pink of the bride's *crêpe-de-Chine*, looped up with natural Bengal roses, was of Basil's selection, and therefore its exquisite simplicity paled before her aunt's gold-laminated brocades and zibline-bordered train.

Marguerite—who never cared much for what she wore—was, as usual, in white, something soft and clinging, with an almost imperceptible current of pearl and silver embroidery frosting its graceful folds; on the left shoulder a cluster of her namesake flowers, fastened by an antique

MOONGLADE

silver Breton heart-and-crown, and about her throat on a slender silver thread a silver fleur-de-lys.

So "young girlish"—*si délicieusement jeune fille!* Basil had thought, as he had glanced furtively at her on her arrival. Now he did not dare to let his eyes wander in her direction, remembering the scene with Laurence only too well. Marguerite was placed diagonally opposite to him—the place of honor was occupied by the British Ambassadors, a handsome woman of fifty or so, whose blond bandeaux retained the silky brilliance that had caused her for many years to be known to her friends by the charming nickname of "*Rose d'or*,"—and above the yellow and lilac orchids of the surtout he trusted himself only to watch the "Gamin's" strong little hands, playing with her knife and fork as though she were attending a school-room *dinette* instead of one of her first formal dinner-parties.

Beside her sat Neville Moray, a trifle too silent and contemplative, but still smiling amiably, and Preston Wynne, from his place by the Ambassadors, caught and passed the ball of gay chatter with Basil and "Antinoüs," his next neighbor. Both were highly amused by his sallies as he related to them a recent trip to Sonora, where the elder Wynne owned a beautiful hacienda. Mexican *haut-faits* were related in vividly picturesque language, dotted now and again with Spanish names and expletives of a gracious canority, while when the narrator dropped into plain United States his discourse became variegated with cowboy vernacular that brought tears of laughter to all eyes.

"We're a queer lot, aren't we?" Wynne was saying. "A regular hodgepodge, *believe me!* You've got to sift the sheep from the goats if you want to have a good time, though I am bound to say that the sheep are not, by a long shot, the most amusing of the two—except when they are mountain-sheep with a lot of kick in them! As to

MOONGLADE

the Dons, they are not half bad, keen as mustard, plucky as they make 'em, and with no genuine harm in them if one knows how to handle the breed. Give me a revolting Mexican first, next, and always, in preference to some of our hand-raised products, made in Germany, for instance."

"You have a lot of Germans out there, haven't you? So have we in Russia, alas!" Basil interposed with a wry smile.

"Yes, Germans are Germans," Wynne replied. "We don't cotton to 'em much, but when fresh off the farm they are all right enough in their way. It's the Germono-American I object to. He who is either born in America, or imported at little cost and so tender an age that he mistakes himself for one of us. We have specimens worth the price of admission, just for the privilege of ogling them. There's one peacherino I especially admire—a big bug, too, you bet! He came over when he was a little shaver, and began his industrial career as a sausage-peddler out West. He knew a thing or two, though, and little by little he came to own a butcher shop, then two, then three—like the boy who started in by selling sand to grocers to put in the sugar—and ended in a lake-shore palace and the smartest set. Well, this ambitious butcher I'm speaking of finally went into the cattle business—wholesale, on the hoof, and all that, you know—until, having made a pile as high as Chimborazo, he housed his family in marble halls and let madame and her young uns have their fling. Nothing was too good for them—an art-gallery filled with masterpieces, a music-room where the most expensive musicanders were heard. Plush liveries placarded with fine gold for the servants—we don't say help any more, even out West; we've found out the fallacy of it—motor-cars from France, a steam-yacht on the lake—they refuse themselves nothing, and their only shame is that old German father of the whole shooting-match,

MOONGLADE

who has not risen with his fortunes! He is a holy show, it's a fact, slouching about in an aged overcoat and a shabby soft hat, up at five every morning and sneaking out of his castle to do what? Bet you'd never guess! Why, just as a matter of habit to go to the stock-yards and with his own hands slaughter a hog. It has become second nature to him, and he swears it gives him an appetite for breakfast."

Sir Robert, who had been neglecting his charming neighbors, burst into a roar of laughter.

"To kill a hog! To kill a . . ." he choked, crimson with appreciation. "Marble halls, hogs—help!" he gurgled on. "You are a queer chap, Wynne! I like you!"

"So do I, Sir Robert," was the prompt reply. "I was afraid my little story might have shocked everybody."

"Nonsense," the Baronet protested. "Give us some more of your experiences, do! You take life as it should be taken—on its jolly side. It's the right way."

Laurence's hazel eyes fixed themselves reproachfully upon her uncle. *She* did not feel inclined to praise Preston Wynne's gaiety. A man jilted by her should have displayed a fitter regret for what he had lost, and, seeking consolation, she turned toward Neville, who, at least, knew what was due her better than to laugh and joke; but, lo and behold, this distinguished young officer was deep in conversation with Marguerite, who looked exasperatingly pretty. There was Basil, too—her own wedded husband—talking and enjoying himself just as if she had never made him a scene and tried to make him squirm! Her fingers closed brutally upon the Sèvres handle of her fruit-knife. Was her power over the stronger sex on the wane? That would be agreeable! In that case she might as well go and bury herself in the snows of Tverna, as Basil had hinted that very morning it might be wise for them to do. He had patiently explained that the peasantry on

MOONGLADE

this particular estate was being rendered restless by agitators and *kabàk* orators. Her exasperating reflections were, however, cut short by the signal from Lady Seton, which brought everybody to their feet. Bowing for once to Continental etiquette, she had picked up both men and women with her eyes, and therefore all assembled together in the adjoining salon, where coffee, liqueurs, and cigarettes awaited them before a brilliant fire.

Strangely enough, it was Basil who appeared at home beneath Sir Robert and Lady Seton's temporary roof-tree, not Laurence; for, disinteresting herself utterly from her relatives and their guests, she withdrew to a side-table and began to turn over the periodicals and papers with which it was littered; her air and expression one of mournful detachment, as if she had long since discovered that the gilding of a cake may, after all, mark but indigestible dough, and was trying to resign herself to this unwholesome diet with angelic patience.

Greatly intrigued by this strange attitude, "Antinoüs" approached her.

"You seem tired, *chère madame*. Will it weary you further if I take a seat here and converse with you?" He was speaking with well-feigned sympathy.

"Not in the least, Monsieur de Plenhöel," she answered, drawing her skirts aside to make room for him on the foot of the lounge to which she had retreated. She did not see that he was considering her out of the corner of an extraordinarily mocking eye.

"What I admire," he was thinking, "are the transports of joy with which she hails the reappearance of her uncle and aunt upon the tapis." But aloud he said, gently, "You remind me of one of our Brittany wild roses to-night, madame."

"Why wild?" she questioned, her eyes softening at the broad hint of compliment. "I am very tame, I assure you."

MOONGLADE

"Really!" he smiled. "One would scarcely connect you with tameness. You are a pronounced personality, and such rarely submit to dulling influences."

She raised her pliant figure from the cushions among which she had been nestling. "You think that?" she murmured, well pleased. "I was afraid I was beginning to drift with the tide."

"A tide of well-deserved success!" he asserted, his blue glances flooding her with admiration. "You are a happy woman, madame, for at the touch of your wand a kingdom has been flung at your little feet."

"A kingdom!" she scoffed, looking at him between her lashes. "Scarcely that!"

"A kingdom of infinite love and tenderness!" Régis de Plenhöel explained in a suddenly altered tone.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Is that what you mean?"

"It is—or rather, it was a minute ago; for now I perceive that our modern Titania is not satisfied with such a realm alone. Fortunately, however, yours is not comprised within the mere compass of a human heart—golden though it be—and I feel sure that you will wield your scepter in right royal fashion."

"You like hyperbole?" she retorted, with some pique. "Or has your kinsman commissioned you to plead a cause already won?"

"I am a free-lance, madame, in the Field of the Cloth of Gold, or in that of Clémence Isaure, at your service or your choice. But, seeing you lost in dreams, I ventured to come and offer my belated congratulations, since the other night you were so surrounded that I did not get a chance to speak to you."

"I accept them all the more gratefully, as it was in your house that my good luck came to me, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"Don't mention it!" retorted Régis, dropping all poetry of tone as if he had suddenly been stung by a bee.

MOONGLADE

"Besides, if you have any one to thank, address yourself to the 'Gamin,' your eternal and loyal champion."

"I was not aware that I needed one!" was the spirited answer; and Laurence let her swiftly hardening eye travel to the piano, at which Marguerite had just seated herself. Neville and Preston Wynne stood on either side of her, imploring her to sing, and she was smiling up at them.

"Don't let yourself be implored!" her father called across to her. "You are not yet grown up enough for that. Let us have '*Pauvre P'tit Gas!*' *mon 'Gamin'!*"

Obediently Marguerite pulled off her long white gloves and began to play a prelude in minor that seemed a lost echo of stormy seas, filled now with the voices of great waves against a rock-bound coast, and again with the sweep of the wind in the rigging of a doomed ship.

Complete and absolute silence fell upon the room at the first notes of her surprisingly deep contralto:

*"Nul ne connaît jamais son âge!
Son nom? Ma foi, pas davantage!
Sa famille? Il n'en avait pas!
On l'avait trouvé sur la plage . . .
Pauvre P'tit Gas!"*

Her extraordinary voice gave a strange pathos to the simple little song, and sent a shiver between Basil's shoulders. Preston and Neville had fallen back and stood motionless, shoulder to shoulder, listening intently to verse after verse of the quaint *complainte*:

*"Lorsque la mer était mauvaise
Il chantait, le cœur plus à l'aise,
Gité, malgré vents et frimas,
Dans un abri de la falaise . . .
Pauvre P'tit Gas!"*

Down went the accompaniment a full octave; distant bells seemed to mingle with the score. One could dis-

MOONGLADE

cern the sobbing of the sea now, the pulsing of the tide, rising, rising, till with a swelling rush it submerged the reefs.

"Or un soir la vague en furie. . . ."

Marguerite had long since forgotten where she was. She was singing as she had so often done on the cliffs of Plenhœl, and her *Pauvre P'tit Gas* was as real to her as he had seemed then:

*"Malgré les brisants et l'orage
Il atteint la côte à la nage
Puis il mourut. . . tant était las! . . .
Pauvre P'tit Gas!"*

Slower and slower came the words:

*"Il fut pleuré dans les ténèbres. . . .
Pauvre P'tit Gas!
Pauvre P'tit Gas!"*

At the last wailing chords she seemed to awaken, rose, and faced swiftly round, in evident surprise to see them all there, but utterly unconscious of the prodigious effect created. A little smile played hide-and-seek beneath "Antinoüs's" mustache; *he* had heard her sing that before; but the rest had not, and the spell seemed unbroken for a full minute before the applause began. The girl, startled and embarrassed, looked around in a long glance of astonishment, and met Basil's eyes fixed upon hers in a manner she had never seen before; but when the others surrounded her with enthusiastic expressions of delight he remained where he had stood during her singing, and did not speak.

CHAPTER VIII

A drag upon the hand and brain,
A chain of gold is still a chain.

A HUGE rack of cloud was driving across the sky at a speed that frayed out long rags from its bellying sails, and trailed them heavily along the tops of the dark pine forest. The earth, but recently freed from the weight of the snow-mantle that for month after month had hidden it from sight, was brown and oozy, dotted with pools and ponds and spontaneous brooks and rivulets engendered by that appalling infliction, a Russian spring break-up.

Hard to bear, even in Moscow or Petersburg, this manifestation of nature becomes in the open country an actual calamity; for it is no small trial to wade from liquid mud to liquid mud, from spongy road to spongier path, while the great wind-storms that precede and follow the breaking of the ice, gurgle and howl and hoot like an army of drunken banshees beneath the arch of deluge overhead.

The solemn ceremonies announcing the formal ending of winter had already taken place. In the presence of the Czar, his Court, and his hierarchy, the cannon rending the hard-glittering surface of the Neva had done its work, and, therefore, officially speaking, spring was born to the Muscovite people. But how dour and morose was this infant season that particular year, shivering and cowering in the cold rain! Indeed, it had not as yet unfolded its very faintest green banner, and continued to sulk away

MOONGLADE

the days and the nights, hiding from all the expectant eyes so impatiently awaiting its advent.

The Province of Tvernovna was being especially ill-treated, and coarse brutality might justly have been laid at the door of the storm-powers responsible for its evil case. There, rivers that had usually been content with flowing like slightly ruffled mill-ponds when once debarrassed of their winter coatings, now turned themselves into raging torrents, demolishing their banks with, so to speak, a wrathful heaving of the shoulder, and spreading out over the steppe in billowing waves, foam-slavered and yellow, sufficient to carry a house off its feet among the débris of trees and bushes that seemed but a smaller edition of the Sargasso Sea.

As a matter of fact the loosed waters had for days been encroaching on the outskirts of the village of Tverna, and already stretched broad tongues and ribbons of wetness toward the base of the slope whereon it nestled below the Castle, until it seemed stranded like a peninsula in a lagoon, and the dark soil floated up by the unpleasing tide spread in an ever-increasing stain over the drowned turf.

The lanes separating the *isbas* into a very unconventional imitation of blocks were well-nigh impassable, save where logs and lengths of rough board had been precariously anchored by stones, so as to allow the inhabitants at least to reach the *kabàk*—or drinking-shop—this indispensable adjunct of any human habitation, especially in the North, wherever that North may befind itself. It is a populous village, numbering twelve hundred "souls," as is plainly testified in orthodox characters by a painted sign at the entrance of the chief thoroughfare. Also its *kabàk* is of a better class than is usually found in such villages, for upon its once whitewashed walls are tacked highly inflamed pictures of many saints and sinners (mostly obtained from wandering peddlers), and the short curtains

MOONGLADE

of the square windows are of heavy red material, large enough to be drawn straight across the double glass of an evening, when "lights out" should be the order of the hour. Of course the atmosphere of the place is neither better nor worse than is to be encountered in similar places the Empire over. An unhappy mixture of *vodka*, *kwàss*, red-cabbage soup—wherein clots of sour milk are wont to lurk—stale tobacco, and the odor of humanity clad in thick woolens and greasy sheepskins gives it its unfragrant character during the day, while at night these amiable factors are overtone by the smoking kerosene-lamps which an all-wise Providence has been powerless to spare to the *mujiks* in this their era of progress.

Tverna has the fortune to be situated in one of Russia's most prosperous provinces. Unlike Sámàrà, Vintkà, and many others, it does not belong to a famine government, also the cholera is seldom heard of there, but, nevertheless, it has its drawbacks; for as it is of great agrarian and political importance, it is visited more frequently than is wholesome for it by professional agitators, who, daring the might of Prince Basil Palitzin, invade its purlieus whenever that kindly lord ventures to absent himself. It is well known that when the "presence flag" waves its silken folds above the Castle, peace and quiet abide in Tverna; but the minute it is hauled down and the *tröika* bearing him away has disappeared from view, the trouble-makers are once more at their evil work.

All day it had been raining densely, and a disheartening evening was setting in, with no prospect whatsoever of better things for the morrow. In the *kabàk* were assembled the more important members of the village council, the *staròstá*—a gigantic man, blond as ripe corn, pink-faced, and with a pair of prominent eyes—so beautifully blue that it is a pity to have to call them stupid—and a dozen or so of less illustrious persons, content with sitting in corners and listening to the pow-wow.

MOONGLADE

Seated sidewise on the massive table was a man of entirely different breed and aspect. To begin with, he wore an ordinary suit of mixed goods, such as any other inhabitants of the world at large might have sported; a scarlet tie—stained and crumpled—showed above his garish waistcoat, and a watch-chain of extreme thickness and brassiness dangled across his lean stomach. Quick, active, alert, lamentably unwashed as to neck and hands, he created at first glance the impression of believing himself to be somebody—a belief that since the morning two or three weeks before, when he had been, as he put it, “marooned” by the swollen waters of the Tvernovo, he had studiously endeavored to popularize.

In spite of his unrequerché appearance and regrettable vulgarity of apparel, he had money—not in great quantities, perhaps, but much more than the few *kopeks* the others there could afford to carry abroad with them.

During his “enforced” sojourn he had constantly posed for the well-informed person who has traveled much, who reads the “leaves” (newspapers), and he had always in his pocket some disgustingly thumbed brochure of an eminently provocative nature, embellished with prints which should never have seen the light of day—or night, either, for the matter of that—but which he displayed with much pride on every possible occasion. So far, it may as well be admitted, he had not shown himself aggressive, nor had he given any one the right to consider him a revolutionary agent, but mayhap he was only a little cleverer than those who had preceded him, or he was merely biding a favorable moment for a declaration of principles. Be this as it might, to-night he seemed more loquacious than heretofore, and began to engage the *staròstá* in an animated conversation—the animation being, of course, all on his side, for the other was a man of a really bovine stolidity.

“What ’ll you do if the water rises any higher?” the

MOONGLADE

visitor demanded of that worthy. His accent was not pure, and belonged to no district of Russia. Indeed, it had a vague Teuton flavor, too slight, however, to be noticed by his illiterate audience; also his sentences did not conform precisely to the idiom of a native-born Muscovite.

"Do?" The *staròstá* removed his pipe from between his thick lips, cast a speculative glance at the dingy ceiling, and brought it slowly down again to the level of his interlocutor. "Why, we have already advised the *tchinòvnik*. What more can we do? It is his affair to help us when we're in trouble." He replaced his pipe in its natural receptacle, pushed back his fur cap, and fell silent again, as though the point was settled once and for all.

"The *tchinòvnik*!" mocked the other. "Can he make the river go back to bed? And what about your tyrant? Why don't you advise *him* of the muddle you're in here? Perhaps he'd be cleverer at that game than the *tchinòvnik*, and it's his duty to protect you from harm, anyhow, isn't it?"

"The Prince?" put in an elder who was lounging by the stove and now raised himself on one elbow. He looked the patriarch to the life, with his long white beard, and snowy locks falling benignantly around his finely wrinkled face. His eyes were still singularly bright under their shaggy eyebrows. "The Prince is far away, and does not know what occurs here."

"He should know!" asserted the man who had given his name as Gregor Lukitch. "What's the use of a tyrant if he's not here when for once in a way he should be—tell me that? Eh?"

The elder pondered for a moment before answering this curious question.

"Well," he said at last, "the Prince is good to us. We have no cause for complaint. His father was the same before him. All of them were always fine *Barines*. There are not many like them."

MOONGLADE

Gregor Lukitch sneered. "Oh, you ancients!" he pronounced. "To listen to you one would think you had never been serfs, slaves, wretched creatures crushed by oppressors, victims of a tyrannical system that rested like a curse upon you, and still bears its bitter fruits. Good *Barines* say you? Ach! You make me sick."

This lofty flight of words was rather lost upon the audience, but a few vague murmurs of approbation were heard to proceed from the corner where the younger men had congregated to smoke vile cigarettes—like kerosene-lamps, cigarettes are modern "luxuries" among the Russian peoples. Indeed, to indulge in "paper pipes"—as they are called—is looked upon as a sign of independence and enlightenment. Unfortunately those obtainable there by the masses are beyond all description offensive, and even the speaker's nostrils, accustomed as they were to the terrible savor of public gatherings, began to quiver queerly.

"*Gott verdamm!*" he swore in a most un-Russian way, but happily quite under his breath. "Why do you little fathers persist in rotting the atmosphere with your beastly cigarettes? Here, have some decentish cigars. At any rate, they'll not poison us!" Which was not strictly true, since the packet of "Perfectos" he pulled from a capacious pocket were, to say the best one could for them, rolled from nicotine-soaked cabbage-leaf, and dangerous-looking at that. The *mujik* is not particular, however, and cigars are to him the absolute complement of wealth and luxury; so with immense gratitude were the "delicacies" accepted and retained, excepting by the *staròstá* and the elder, who knew better than to be tempted.

"If I were you," the irrepressible Gregor now went on, "I would speedily put myself in a position to live on the fat of the land, eat my fill, drink something better than government *vòdka*, and enjoy life while I've got it to enjoy."

MOONGLADE

"What's the matter with government *vodka*?" asked a tall, upstanding chap, blond and blue and pink as the *staròstá* was, but with less of that worthy person's dullness. "It's strong and cheap, isn't it? Much cheaper than when we had to buy it from the Jew innkeepers."

Gregor brought his shoulders to a level with the top of his small, flat, lobeless ears.

"You make me sweat!" he said, with ineffable contempt. "You'd be satisfied with anything, as long as you can burn your foolish throats with strong alcohol. Why, I tell you"—and here he beat one dirty fist into a grimier palm, the better to emphasize his point—"the government is getting millions out of you, jackasses that you are; and what do you get in return? Why, stuff not fit to wash horses' feet with. Cheap! No! A thousand times no, not at the price your guts pay for it. Then, also, it stupefies your brains that, by G—, don't need it! And that's just what the government wants—to make you more imbecile than you already are. When you had to sell your harvests before they were out of the ground, in order to buy enough to get drunk as often as you could, sometimes you stopped to think. Now, with your nasty little cheap bottlefuls of 'destroyer' that you stow in all your pockets, and guzzle from morning till night, it's much worse. You're never sober. Oh, you can look at me! I don't care. I'm speaking the truth. And who have you to thank for all this? Why, your 'good *Barines*,' of course, your high lords who make the laws and keep you idiots under their thumbs. Government monopoly! Yah! Perhaps you were thinking that was all arranged for your benefit. But you are sheep, nothing else but sheep, grazing where you chance to be put, whether the grass is long or short, dry or juicy, never once dreaming of seeking new pastures to fill your bellies full."

He paused, expelled a generous cloud of smoke from his well-trained lungs, and glanced triumphantly about

MOONGLADE

him. The listeners were becoming interested, as was testified by varied and guttural grunts. The *staròstá* alone did not seem to relish the joke.

"You might talk more politely of my *vòdka*, you there!" he commented, raising his ponderous bulk from the bench near the stove. "I don't get it for nothing, if I do sell it cheap! The government doesn't make me a present of it, does it?"

The man opened his displeasing mouth wide, and laughed from the tonsils forward, his small, red-rimmed eyes disappearing almost completely in his bilious, moon-shaped face.

"Ah, well!" he chuckled. "You'll always be the same shiftless good-for-naughts. I've told you so before, little fathers. I say so again!" He went on licking his cigar to reattach a ragged edge of pseudo-tobacco. "See, you! Your tyrant married a little while ago. Did he perhaps wed a dame of his own rank, even of his people—of ours, I mean?" he hastily corrected. "No, he's taken a wife from among strangers, from an island you don't know anything about, nor even where it is; but I do. It's called England, and they are all merchants there, and—as you're so devout—you might just as well know that they have another God than we in Holy Russia. Their priests are no priests at all; they dress like you and me—that is," he interpolated, "like me, for they, of course, don't wear your *touloupe* or your *kaftán*!" He granted an approving tap to his eminently reproachable trousers and coat, which, according to him, were models of Anglican fashion, and once more glanced about him.

"Not of our religion!" chorused the audience. "Do you say that her new Highness is not of our religion?"

Gregor saw that he had scored a point, and gave instant attention to driving it home.

"They made her take some vows, of course," he explained, unsatisfactorily. "I've read something of the

MOONGLADE

kind in the news-sheets, but can you make a black heifer white by mumbling words over her? Can you change one from the south into one of us northerners? You can't, eh? Well, neither can the Archimandrite change a foreign woman into a Russian lady fit to rule you as you seem to like being ruled."

Marzof, the elder, rose to his full height. "You're talking great foolishness, my son," he calmly stated. "Why do you come and speak against strangers to us, who have known the grandmother of our Prince? She came from foreign parts, too, and she was an angel straight out of heaven, I'll swear it. We gave her a name here, for we couldn't say right the one she bore; that was too difficult for our stiff tongues, and the name we gave her was 'Raïssa' (the Heaven-sent). We were serfs then still—slaves, as you say—but she cared for us as if we'd been her own children. When the great sickness [cholera] came, she went from house to house, never afraid, helping us, feeding us, touching us with her tiny white hands." The old man lifted his fur cap and reverently went on. "May God keep fresh the memory of Princess Raïssa, the blessed grandmother of our present Prince, and the mother of our late master, who, too, was kind to his people, and may He rest their souls in His Paradise!" He sat heavily down again, and Gregor Lukitch slipped from the table to the sanded floor.

"I abandon you—I leave you to your fate!" he clamored, spreading wide his arms, as one who lets drop a burden too heavy for his strength. "I leave you, I say, to your ignorance and your sloth. You will not see the truth when it's shown to you clear as day. What more can I do!"

"You can speak less, in any case!" came witheringly from the corner near the stove, and a burst of laughter greeted old Marzof's repartee. Plainly these people—save half a dozen hotheads or so who always drank in every

MOONGLADE

word Gregor pronounced—were not ready yet to swallow his preachings whole; but he was no fool, and knew well that at a given moment in Russia a mere handful of powder will set a province on fire. Where, therefore, was the use of flurry or haste? And as by now his own throat was dust-dry, he helped himself to a few deep swigs of that *vodka* he had so harshly condemned—and looked the better for it.

Tverna was, in its way, not a bad village, where it lay spread out like a handful of grain carelessly scattered at the foot of the great Castle. There were not many rowdies there—not at least considering its comparatively large population. A few lazy, leisure-loving individuals, overfond of drink and carousing, who, if improperly led, might give trouble, but that was all so far.

Indeed, here, more than on any other of Basil's estates, Laurence would find her opportunity for good, if she wished to take it. As has just been seen, her husband's grandmother had been literally worshiped at Tverna (her favorite abode), and well-beloved wherever her lord's dominions extended; although she had, like Laurence, never set her foot on Russian soil before her marriage. She had learned the prickly language of her adopted country with an ease perhaps due to the difficulty of her own native Breton, and had adapted herself so rapidly to the customs and modes of the land she had learned to love that the remembrance of her was living, and very vividly so, where once she had reigned as a beneficent queen.

At the beginning of their wedded life Basil had been convinced that Laurence, too, would become the adored of his people. Her beauty, her grace, were factors in this task that no Slav—those passionate admirers of pretty women—would overlook. She would be pleased by their reverence, he had decided, pleased and flattered by their natural and instinctive deference of attitude; and when-

MOONGLADE

ever he had thought thus of the future—which was often—he had represented her to himself riding by his side on the forest roads or wrapped in the furs of her sleigh gliding over the snowy plains, or driving across the *steppe* in the golden days of summer on errands of kindness and mercy; for if Basil had a serious fault, it was to idealize, almost to the point of rendering it unrecognizable, every object of his love or affection.

That Laurence had not married him, as she so unsweetly expressed it, to go and “bury herself” in Russia, had never for a second entered his brain in those days. She had taken him for better or for worse—and certainly in his mind the latter clause could not be considered to mean the delightful accomplishment of simple duties under the most fortunate and agreeable of circumstances. She was a Russian Princess now, full-fledged and accredited—not one of the many make-believes who adopt the title as they would a new fashion as soon as they are out of the Muscovite dominions, because in the rest of Europe Russian Princes are the mode, and mere Counts and Countesses quite out of it, as it were. It followed, therefore, that she would behave in accordance with her rank—“with her heart,” he had mentally added; and so, even when some doubts had obtruded themselves upon him, when the Paris winter season began to draw to a close he did not hesitate to make all preparations for a long sojourn at Tverna.

Laurence did not openly oppose this plan. She intimated once or twice, it is true, that she would prefer to spend the spring in Paris—in fact, to remain there until the *Grand Prix*; but as yet not rough-shod enough to adventure herself on what she saw would be slippery ground, she ended by consenting to a speedy departure, albeit with no very good grace.

One thing only pleased her in this complete separation from her present haunts, and that was the impossibility it would bring about of any further intimacy with the

MOONGLADE

Plenhöels. During the past few months she had actually succeeded in persuading herself that she really had reasons to be jealous of the "Gamin"—and jealous she had indeed become, but it was not on Basil's account. There had been several encounters between her and her husband on the subject. Not very acrimonious ones, nor very violent, but yet quite sufficiently unpleasant to make him dread meeting his relatives when Laurence was present, for her very real hatred of Marguerite made her seize any occasion to vituperate against her. When alone Basil rarely accorded himself the joy of visiting at the Hôtel de Plenhöel, for this joy was beginning to appear to him a dangerous one. Indeed, he had by this curious course of conduct ended by arousing a sort of pained surprise in Marguerite, and a great deal of speculative astonishment in "Antinoüs," who was gradually but surely becoming hurt and angry at his kinsman's altered behavior and apparent coldness.

"*Cette pie-grièche le rend assomant!*" he pondered, which may be approximately Englished as "That sour-minded magpie is transforming him into a regular bore"—and wouldn't Laurence have loved "Antinoüs" for this interpretation of her influence over his favorite cousin! but, ignorant of the curious inside workings of this family dissension, she rejoiced at her cleverness in estranging them from one another, little guessing what it would result in ultimately. "Leave well enough alone" is a sentence she might have called to mind with infinite profit to herself, but, unfortunately, her narrow, plotting little brain had no room for that thought for the morrow which often results so conveniently in the fruition of time.

CHAPTER IX

The door was shut, and cobwebbed too.
Across the dusty panels grew
Thick tendrils of Regret and Pain,
When Love unbarred, and glancing through,
Smiled sadly once, then closed it to,
And footfalls died away again.

It was a wonderful morning, all aglow with sunbeams as yet unchequered by shadows, for the trees of the Bois and the Champs-Élysées were but just beginning to star their naked branches with gauze-like shreds of tiniest leaf. Even the famous "Marronnier-du-vingt-Mars" had scarcely disenvolved its fan-shaped foliage, and its burgeons for the most part still glistened in their smart brown rubber corselets. The sky was blue as forget-me-nots, and some venturesome white butterflies flitted by on gossamer wings as Basil turned his horses' noses toward the left bank of the Seine, after some hours spent in the Bois de Vincennes, alone, as it were, with awakening Nature.

"I shall go and see how they are," he mused, flicking a disgracefully inexperienced baby fly from his off leader's ear with the end of his long four-in-hand whip. "Surely there can be no harm in that, I trust!" He smiled a little bitterly, and, gathering the ribbons more firmly into his hands, slowed down to take a difficult turning with his customary skill.

The river glittered bravely as he crossed the bridge, clothing itself all over with steel and silver when a fleecy

MOONGLADE

little flock of cloudlets that had followed him from the "Arc-de-Triomphe" interposed their diaphanousness between him and the sun; but as soon as they had sailed on resuming its gallant armor of golden scales again; and when at last he reached the Noble Faubourg he found that the clouds had let themselves be distanced and that Spring reigned supreme.

Topping the garden walls of the Hôtel de Plenhöel the dainty trails of centenarian ivies were overtuned by the first shoots of snugly protected climbing rose-vines, that formed a triumphant garland of crimson-tipped green along the ancient granite coping.

With a curious beating of the heart Basil drove into the stone-paved courtyard and stopped his beautiful team of bays at the foot of the steps.

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis and mademoiselle were within," the *Suisse* admitted, with as near an approach to a welcoming smile as his dignified functions would allow (for Basil was cherished by inferiors, whether they belonged to his household or to those of other people), and with no decorum at all he ran into the hall, smiling gaily at that splendid official.

"How do you do?" he was calling a second later from the foot of the great stairs, where he stood beside the servant who had taken his coat. Holding lightly to the banisters, Marguerite was coming down almost at a run, and there was a freshness, a delicacy, a something pure and untouched about her, that made his heart, his very soul, warm with infinite tenderness. Contrary to her habit, she was not in white, but wore a linen frock of clear azure, and on her bright hair a floppy garden-hat woven of pliant straw, around which a wide loose-knotted *bleu-de-ciel* ribbon made her eyes bluer yet by sympathy.

"How are you, you rarity!" she cried, taking the two last steps at a bound and stretching out both hands to him.

MOONGLADE

The footman had disappeared, and, still holding his hands playfully, she drew him into a little salon opening straight from the hall.

"Sit down, monseigneur!" she laughed, pointing to an arm-chair beside the sofa, on the edge of which she settled herself like a bird, her fingers interlaced, her delicious head cocked on one side, sparrow-wise.

On a tabouret near by, and also between the two windows giving on the garden, stood big "buckets" of blue Sèvres, filled with blue hortensias—the exact blue of that negligently tied ribbon that seemed somehow to fascinate him. A ray of mote-laden sunshine gilded the Mazarine carpet about her tiny feet incased in silver-buckled white suède, and he smiled appreciatively.

"New shoes?" he queried, glancing down at them.

"Yes—isn't that strange?" she smiled. "Old ones would scarcely suit this glorious weather. But how nice of you to come. . . . It has been an age . . ."

Her lips were smiling, but her eyes had an unusual under-depth of seriousness, and he came to earth rather flatly.

"Yes," he said, brusquely, resuming the queer stiffness of attitude that had so deeply puzzled her when he had first adopted it. "It is quite a while since I came." And for the second time he said, "How are you?"

"So-so," she answered, all liveliness of tone and gesture momentarily eclipsed. "One is always so-so, is one not, in this good old Paris?"

"You should be far better than so-so, even here," he stated, with astonishing severity, "you, whom the gods have showered with all blessings."

"Have a cigarette!" she shrugged, pushing from beneath the hortensias a silver box and match-stand.

"No, thanks. I don't care to smoke here. Your father says it oxidizes the ermines."

"Papa? Nonsense! He never dreamt of caring for

MOONGLADE

the ermines' health. Besides, they are old enough to look after themselves. They are pretty, though!" she added, pointing to the heraldic ermines of Brittany embroidered in silver relief all over the pale satin of walls and hangings. "Pretty and antique," she concluded, meditatively.

"Like most of your ideas," he stated, leaning back and contemplating the intenseness of the hortensias.

She glanced at him between half-closed lashes, an imperceptible frown wrinkling her eyebrows.

"You find me too old-fashioned?" she questioned, drumming softly on the lid of the cigarette-box with the fingers of her left hand.

"N-no—yes. I don't know; and, moreover, it's none of my business."

"None of your—business?" She stared. "None of your—" Her fingers abruptly ceased drumming, and she turned toward him a face of real bewilderment. "Aren't we friends—relatives?"

He stirred uneasily, his eyes fixed on the carpet, as if desirous of counting the convolutions of its intricate pattern.

"Friends? Why, certainly friends! Of course . . . we are friends! But what's that got to do with it? You have other friends, and so—so have I, of course."

Marguerite's little ears were getting pink. What ailed the man, anyhow? Quick-tempered as she was soft-hearted, she felt oddly angry all at once.

"Other friends!" she exclaimed. "Friends like me? You mean to tell me that you have lots of friends like me?"

"Well," Basil murmured, lamely, "not precisely like you. Nobody's quite like you, but, nevertheless . . ."

"But—nothing at all!" she cried, truculently. "What has come over you lately, Basil Palitzin? You did not use to pose and posture in the old days. You were such

MOONGLADE

a good comrade, such a trump. Tell me, *what—is—the—matter—with—you?*”

Again Basil twisted as if on pins and needles, twice he clasped and unclasped his hands, and the string of derogatory epithets he inwardly applied to himself would have made a trooper blush.

“You women are incredible,” he attempted to explain. “Young, old, or very young, you are all the same with your extraordinary imaginings. What *should* be the matter with me, pray? Do you notice any signs of incipient decrepitude?”

“I notice,” Marguerite cut in, “that you are changed, and in no way to your advantage, *Cousin* Basil. Once you used to be pleased at my liking you so much, but now you have become as repellant as possible. You pull faces a yard long; you are always in a bad humor, and if it were not so preposterous I would almost begin to think that you do not care for us any more, and that you have made up your mind to see as little of us as you decently can.”

“Oh, Innocence!” Basil thought, sadly. “Thank God she does not know what tortures she puts me through!” Aloud he said: “You are talking rank heresy, my dear Marguerite. Your father and—yourself are among those I am most attached to—you can never doubt that!”

“Thank you!” she scoffed, with a derisive inclination of her big floppy hat. “That’s kind of you to mention it *en passant*, but let me urge you to realize that you give no sign of it.”

“You cannot expect to have a monopoly of my affections!” muttered Basil, driven to desperation.

Marguerite bent forward and looked straight at him. “What did you say . . . a monopoly?” Her voice was now very cool and nonchalant. Basil caught the look and his breath at one and the same time. Where had this child learned to speak like that? Atavism? The Marquise of the bird-suite at Plenhœl could not have done

MOONGLADE

better if talking to the canaille at the foot of the guillotine; and not for the life of him could he utter a word in self-defense.

"A monopoly!" the "Gamin" repeated. "You use funny expressions sometimes, my cousin, and I must say that you amuse me very much."

"You don't amuse me!" he interposed, hotly. "I don't know, moreover, why you take my words so greatly amiss. What I am trying to make you understand is that if I do not come here as—well, as often as I could wish, it is because I have other calls upon—er—my time; imperative demands upon—my attention. My duty—you understand, is to—"

She did not let him finish. "You are the best judge of your conduct and the employment of your time, and I regret having—twitted you about it. I am afraid it was very silly of me, but you see I am still very much the mere child you used to laugh with at Plenhœl. You may remember, perhaps, our last little encounter on that subject?"

She laughed, rose, and in a slightly constrained tone added: "Hadn't you better go and see papa? He is at the top of the house, grubbing in the dust of a wonderful garret, full of delightful *vieilleries*, together with some workmen who are supposed to repair pipes, or leaders—I don't exactly know which. Papa is extremely proud of his fifteenth-century garrets, let me tell you! One never knows where vanity is going to take root!"

Basil had risen slowly, and was gazing at her as she made her way to the bay leading through to the next salon, and his lips were not very steady when he spoke again:

"You are not angry, Marguerite?" This timidly, almost in a whisper. She turned back with a queer little laugh.

"Angry?" she asked. "Not a bit of it. It isn't worth

MOONGLADE

while. But hark you, Cousin Basil, don't make any mistake. The 'Gamin' is a better friend of yours than you think. I may not yet be a young lady with grand manners. I am a good little chap, however—a tomboy, if you like; but try me if you ever need a real, genuine, bona-fide, faithful-to-the-end friend, and you'll see!"

She pirouetted and, beckoning to him to follow, raced up the long flight of secondary stairs which led to the very roof.

Half-way to the top she suddenly paused on the threshold of a domed and glassed-in gallery that projected from the side of the house over the inclosed garden. It was filled with palms and plants and blossoming creepers, with here and there the fairy plume of a bamboo aspiring to the transparent curves above. The upper end of this miniature Vale of Kashmir was crossed by a broad span of almost invisible wire, behind which birds of a tropical splendor of feather flitted hither and yon. The liquid counterpart of this delightful unstill life was afforded by a long crystal panel revealing the musical spirt of a fountain, and a background of gorgeous aquatic plants, crisscrossed by the alert dartings of the prettiest collection of highly painted fishes possible to imagine. Moving jewels they seemed, as they quadrilled in the clear element of their birth, and not unhappy at all, as most aquarium-dwellers seem to be, for their perfect comfort had been studiously considered, and they appeared very much in love with existence as it was made for them there.

Basil had come to a standstill behind the 'Gamin,' and as she turned to speak he thought: "Her breath is as meadowsweet, her face like a flower, her hair was assuredly spun by elves, and her eyes—" Here comparison failed him, and with bent head he listened to the end of a sentence he had not been conscious of her beginning.

"—you might as well tell me, after all," the low, clear voice was saying, and he looked helplessly at her.

MOONGLADE

"Didn't you hear what I asked?" she petulantly exclaimed. "I am speaking plain French, am I not?"

Plain French! Could anything be plain that was connected with her?

"What were you asking?" he found himself forced to answer to those indignant eyes.

"Oh, you don't even listen any more!" she reproached.

"I am an idiot!" he humbly confessed. "An idiot and a boor!"

Her soft, ringing laugh suddenly rippled out beneath the opulent foliage.

"My poor Basil!" she sympathized. "That's what comes of being in love! Hortense Gervex used to tell me, when I was a baby, that Cupid is the silliest of all the gods, because he takes a malicious pleasure in stupefying all his subjects."

"Comes from being in love?" Basil said, slowly. "Oh, of course that would be an explanation."

"It is!" she triumphed. "Why, ever since you met Laurence you have been so different, so unlike your old self. Still, you should not carry your absence-of-mind too far; it is dreadfully impolite, you know."

"I know," he assented, apparently quite absorbed in the fantastic beauty of a bird-of-paradise blossom he had disengaged from amid its long, lance-like leaves.

"Well, if you know, and are properly contrite for your sins, do you mind if I now repeat my question?"

"Mind? Repeat it by all means, if you find me still worthy of the slightest attention."

She had walked farther into the perfumed bower, and was now standing in the searching noonday light that was powerless to reveal a single flaw in her loveliness. She looked like one of the faintly-rosé camellias on a near-by bush—surely made from the same cool velvet as her little face.

MOONGLADE

She inclined her head graciously—the “Gamin” was certainly growing up in the social amenities.

“You will not think me altogether indiscreet—I hope,” she questioned, in a suddenly crisp-cut voice he had never heard her use before, and there was a quaint little assumption of solicitude as she went on, “if I reask where you intend to spend the summer?”

Basil’s spirit was by this time in sad confusion, but he must answer her, and yet he could not bring himself to admit that it would be in a place far removed from their beloved haunts. An automatic second-self, doubtless summoned by the puzzling emergency, spoke for him.

“I think,” he said, slowly, “I might safely assert that I do not know as yet.”

She gave a light little laugh, and appeared to ponder for a moment.

“I”—there was the briefest suspension—“I am very glad you do not know as yet. Because it may turn out to be in Brittany!”

“That was a near thing,” Basil thought, drawing a profound but silent sigh of momentary relief.

“Still, are you *quite* sure that you do not know—as yet?” she resumed, taking a step in the direction of a sort of Dresden-china hod hanging between two pomegranate-bushes, that grew luxuriantly from old Spanish oil-jars of that green earthenware which makes one’s mouth water to look at, and plunging her hand into one of its cunningly devised compartments, extracted therefrom a little fistful of bird-seed.

“This is the pantry,” she explained, holding a fold of her skirt up to catch the surplus filtering through her fingers. “Would you like to feed them?”

“Whom?”

“Again?” she laughed. “Wool-gathering again! Why, naturally, I meant the elephants in the *Jardin des Plantes*. How did you fail to guess that?”

MOONGLADE

"I am sorry. . . . I was trying to solve . . . a problem . . . concerning the . . . er . . . social question."

"Dear me! Poor old Basil! If you keep such lofty ideals always before you you'll soon cease being a social success. Besides," she glibly continued, "it is not in your line to ponder and reflect like a fuzzy old owl; you are a man of action, *par excellence*, and when one tries to force one's talents one does nothing with grace."

"Are you turning philosopher?" he tried to taunt her.

"Philosophy is becoming part of my day's work," she airily replied. "But now do look at Bolingbroke; he is awfully jealous!"

"Bolingbroke! May I be pardoned for hazarding another question? Who is Bolingbroke?"

Marguerite looked at Basil, and again her glance held a subtle mixture of mirth and gravity.

"You—as I remarked before—are getting into the sad habit of forgetting your most faithful friends and honest admirers. Why this is Bolingbroke!" And she pointed with an upward toss of her obstinate little chin to a gilded swing whereon reposed, in magnificent dignity, a great white cockatoo, crested and tailed with brilliant orange. Some subterranean disturbance was agitating his snowy breast feathers, and his round eyes, dilated with greed, watched Marguerite's every move as she fed the lesser luminaries below.

"Oh, you wretched usurper!" She addressed him grandiloquently. "This form of food would neither suit nor please you, and yet you covet it! Isn't that very human?" she tragically demanded of Basil, who had at last managed to summon an apology for a laugh to his assistance. "Remind yourself," she went on flippantly, "that, unlike some others of his kind, he cannot express his desires by word of beak. Repressed inclinations are hard to bear, but the impossibility of ever giving them voice, excepting by shrieks of distress, must be awful indeed!"

MOONGLADE

Basil was watching her intently, trying in vain to discover whether she was quite as joyful as she seemed.

"Would you oblige me by making a long arm—you are so agreeably tall—and presenting this token of our joint regard to yonder regicide?" she resumed, indicating a majolica wooden shoe on a table close by. "No, not the whole thing; *one* of the therein-contained biscuits . . . please!"

And while complying with her request Basil was thinking, thinking, thinking! "What a coward I am! Why not tell her the truth? What's the use of shirking the task because it hurts me to do the right thing? And what would she really care, this heavenly baby, with her toys, her exquisite amusements, her deadly simplicity? She will not miss me a moment of all those years to come."

"*Poverino!*" Marguerite was meanwhile apostrophizing the ill-tempered bird. "Here, you! Accept this offering gently if you can. It is well meant, and the biscuit is good and sweet! *Mille grazie, eccellenze,*" she added to Basil. "I am in an Italian mood to-day, as you may perceive. This gracious retreat looks Italian, I think; so do the camellias, and the blue sky over our crystalline dome; so do these little pet vassals of mine; feeding from the hand, as all properly self-respecting vassals should do."

She tossed the rest of her fistful of seeds to the Bengalis, the gold and green finches, the slim Holland canaries, the redcaps, and twenty other chiefs of tribe whirling around on the sanded floor of their palatial abode to snatch the tempting breakfast from one another.

"They *are* human," he harshly commented while following their airy gyrations, "hence quarrelsome and envious, just like Bolingbroke. Too bad that such innocent-looking creatures should have such beastly faults!"

Marguerite seemed suddenly troubled. "Why are you

MOONGLADE

bitter even about trifles?" she queried. "Is that yet another departure from the old state of affairs?"

"Perhaps," he replied, in a tone that strove in vain to be light. "I must be unlearning fast the art of life as it should be lived. I suppose that with the years one passes from disenchantment to disenchantment. Isn't that the rule of all down-slope walkers?"

With a quick intake of breath Marguerite swung round toward him, and his heart contracted horribly as he saw that her eyes were wet.

"There is something amiss," she whispered, bending ever so slightly forward, and stretching her little palms downward as if in swift renunciation of all that she had ever held. "There is something. I knew it. I felt it. . . . Tell me, Basil . . . tell me!"

He had not bargained for this, and he was now dully doubting his own ears. Could this be Marguerite speaking?

"Something amiss?" he repeated after her with would-be emphasis. "Oh, now look here, my dear child, be reasonable, please, and do cease to imagine that I am trying to conceal some catastrophe from you."

But Marguerite would no longer accept equivocation of any sort.

"Reasonable?" she said, more calmly. "I am reasonable enough—at least for my age. And if you only reflect you will admit that I have some small reason to ask what I do—some infinitesimal right, *as a friend*, if you prefer it so."

"Oh yes—she too has rights!" flashed keenly through his mind. "And better ones than any other human being, if she but knew it." "Certainly," he said aloud, "you have all possible rights as my friend—as any of my friends have—to know what concerns me; but there is nothing—nothing worth telling, I assure you."

"Nothing?" she exclaimed. "When you are as dull as

MOONGLADE

ditch-water—when you seem as blue as—” Her eyes went to the transparent vaulting scarcely veiling the sky, as if searching for a fitting comparison, and he grasped at his last chance of repairing his previous mistake.

“I am blue, and a little sad; perhaps you are right.” He hesitated. “Just as any one else would be who contemplates a certain change in existing circumstances.”

She was looking at him steadily, unswervingly, waiting.

“When I told you a little while ago that I didn’t know as yet exactly where I would spend the summer, I was speaking the truth. As a matter of fact, I do not know yet *exactly* where, but it will be somewhere in Russia, probably at Tverna, and just . . . on account of this indecision on my part I was afraid you’d laugh at me as you so often do!”

“The Russian conception of what is laughable differs by the whole span of heaven from mine,” she said, with suspicious quietness. “The point of interest is, however, whether you are going there a-Maying in the mud, or . . . whether . . . well, whether you will be gone long. . . . I mean after the Maying and the summering are both done with.”

Reassured by her deceiving calm, he thought himself clever to seize the moment when truth might be quite truthfully conveyed.

“That depends upon so many circumstances,” he explained. “It is impossible to be precise, but I should say . . . yes, I should certainly say that it may take . . . er . . . a year, or even more, to bring matters requiring my presence at home to a satisfactory conclusion.”

Her pitiful little face had slowly whitened as he spoke, and suddenly he felt her fingers desperately clutching his arm.

“A year or more . . . oh! what shall I do without—!”

The rest was strangled by a will-power fifty years older

MOONGLADE

than herself. But for a second she stood shaking from head to foot, trying vainly to master feelings too complex and difficult for her young soul to understand; and he—well, he remained frozen to his place, not daring to move, to say a word; absolutely terrified for the first time in his brave, straight life.

From his high perch Bolingbroke watched the scene, half of his biscuit still held firmly in one sharp claw, his brilliant head inclined to one side critically, cynically—one would have sworn. "What fools these mortals be!" he seemed to say, and doubtless to create a diversion he dropped the remainder of his tidbit upon Basil's shoulder, and burst into a demoniacal yell, like that of a Comanche Indian on the war-path.

The "Gamin" gave a little laugh so queer that it made its hearer ready to cry, and she let go of his arm. "You wicked old witch-bird!" she scolded. "What a fright you gave me!"

"He is a bit startling!" Basil assented, endeavoring to get control of his voice.

"Yes, he makes one's head ache," she corroborated. "But just think of it! Poor papa is still in the dust. Let's go and sweep the cobwebs off him. He must be covered with them!"

She made a swift move toward the flower-gallery's jessamine-draped doorway, and paused, holding lightly to a drooping branch.

"By the way," she said, over her shoulder, "when do you go?"

"When do I—go? In a few days, but . . . I'll certainly come and say farewell before I do," he lamely replied.

"Thanks so much! Yes, I think it will be right to remember us on such an occasion. Papa is so very punctilious about matters of etiquette, you know!"

She again gave that queer little laugh that dismayed him, and disappeared into the hall.

MOONGLADE

"Marguerite!" he called, hurriedly. "Next time it will be official, and I will not be alone. Can't you say *au revoir* properly now?" He knew he should not have said that as soon as he had done so.

Counting her steps mechanically, she came back, and here at last was the doorway within which he stood. Sweet and serene she reached his side. A little color had come back to her face.

"Of course I can," she assented. "*Au revoir*, Cousin Basil! *Au revoir* and good-luck to you!"

Could he stand much more of this? His handsome features looked suddenly wooden beneath their extreme pallor, but she was no longer looking at him. For the fraction of a second he hesitated. Could he venture to take her in his arms, just this once, like a child one has known and cherished all one's life? A shiver ran all over him. The pause had been too short to attract her notice, but it had served its turn. Summoning to his aid his last remnants of self-respect, he held out both his hands, in which she put her own.

"*Au revoir*, and God keep you in His care!" he said, very low; then, hastily, almost brusquely, he pressed his lips into the rosy hollow of each little palm and dropped them.

"God bless you and keep you," she whispered, and, turning quickly on her pointed heels, she preceded him up-stairs to the dusty regions where "Antinoüs" was so usefully occupied.

CHAPTER X

There be twin crowns, whose kingly dower
Forbids to fail or swerve,
Borne by twin angels, Love and Power,
And writ thereon, "I serve."

"Ah, yes, Princess, I pity you with all my heart! Imagine hiding your charm, your beauty, in a prison like Tverna—excuse me, Basil-Vassilièvitch—but you know that Tverna, magnificent though it be, *is* a prison nine months out of the year . . . a grand prison, I admit, but still a jail—a place to distract one with its loneliness."

Countess Chouróff, sitting bolt upright in her chair of state, was heading her hospitable table in a dazzling haze of jewels that outlined her meager person at every edge.

"She reminds me of a wire sign illuminated by electricity," thought Basil, who sat on her right hand.

"You are very severe, Vassilissa-Andrièvna, very severe indeed, to my birthplace!" he said, smiling.

"Severe! Hear this miscreant talk!" she appealed to the company, nodding a tiaraed coiffure until the gigantic diamonds and emeralds spiking it in every direction flashed again. "But men are like that . . . they do not understand our tenderer natures. My poor husband was identically the same—God rest his soul!" She crossed herself scrupulously with a bony yellow hand loaded with enormous gems. "Duty was his eternal rallying-cry—bless him! It was our duty to vegetate in the wilds at his side until it became imperative for our daughters to

MOONGLADE

be presented, and then the grumbles, the lamentations that ensued! Dear! Dear! One would have sworn he was on his way to be crucified. I assure you, Princess, that if you yield at the beginning to marital tyranny you will never again be able to call your soul your own."

Laurence, in all the panoply of a great mondaine at a feast given in her honor, was somehow or other entirely out of it. This was something never dreamt of before: a dinner at one of the most ancient houses of a far-off Russian province, carried out with the pompous ceremonial and curious discomforts of past days, in a banqueting-hall spacious enough to shelter an army and evidently open to all the winds of heaven. It was raining heavily outside, with no promise of better things to come, and from her place she could see files of servants in full livery running to and fro from the kitchen—built *à la mode d'il-y-a longtemps*, in the middle of the inner court—bearing covered silver dishes, all adrip with the diluvian downpour. The majordomo, stiff as a ramrod, advanced as far as the edge of the glass marquise every five minutes or so, to convey his orders in a withering autocratic voice which grew sweet as honey the minute he re-entered the banqueting-hall, and the four butlers in attendance marched and countermarched with the omnipresent lacqueys, all attired in the Chouróff scarlet and gold, like captains heading small detachments of troops. What manner of country was this?

Another surprising anachronism—at least so it appeared to her—was the fact that albeit this was an occasion when, to use the French simile, the little dishes had been rammed into the big ones (*les petits plats dans les grands*), yet the feudal custom of "guests below the salt" was strictly adhered to. Indeed, the implacable etiquette of the House of Chouróff separated the festive board into two exact parts, one reserved for ceremoniously invited gentlemen and ladies, the other for the poor rela-

MOONGLADE

tives, the hangers-on, and the household proper—comprising tutors, governesses, the Polish land-steward, a host of lady companions, another of penniless noble damsels awaiting the Countess's good pleasure to obtain a small "dot" from her generosity, the almoner, the medical officer of the district, and other functionaries of similar importance.

"What an idea!" Laurence reflected. "What extravagant barbarism and outlandishness! How they would laugh at home if they saw this." Laugh she did not, however. She was impressed, in spite of her silent disapproval, and a little frightened, too. This masterful woman in claret-hued velvet, who led her people with something like a field-marshal's bâton, and managed, however, to inspire them with a curious mixture of passionate devotion and abject terror, remained a mysterious and awesome power to her. Also Countess Chouróff was by no means dazzled by her, Laurence's, high rank and fortune, for she was absurdly wealthy herself, and a very great lady, notwithstanding her oddities and extravagances of speech; a personage of weight and power in the land such as Laurence could never hope to be, and one with whom the new-comer could not, as she had done with almost everybody elsewhere, pose and posture, which, of course, vexed the bride not a little.

"You can never realize," Madame Chouróff was saying now, "what a trip to Petersburg meant then, Princess! Oh, it was a voyage indeed! We looked like a veritable Noah's ark procession, let me tell you, setting off from here after the snow began to bear. *Berlines* swung on runners, and *kibitkas* and *fourgons*—preceded by couriers on horseback or in light wagons—*télégas*—and what not? A noise, a clamor, when getting under way, of which you can have no conception! Of course we had to carry with us half of the *batterie de cuisine*—how else would we have fared on the road?—and the *chef* with his scullions, his

MOONGLADE

silver saucepans! How he would swear over the portable stoves to be used *en route*, at the miserable post-houses!" She laughed heartily, creating thereby a veritable pyrotechnic commotion with her jewels.

"I remember once when we were snowed in, stuck fast between two stations—post-stations, you understand—flakes as big as swans' wings falling, falling, falling in a dense curtain. Four of my children were almost infants then, eight and nine years old, I think. Let me see, was it the twins? . . . I can't remember; perhaps Zina and Dimitri, Nikola and Sônitzkà; it does not matter, however. Anyhow, they were asleep in their father's traveling-carriage, at full length, so that he had to get out and join me and the girls—four of them, mind you—that made six of us pressed together like sardines, eating on our laps from the provision-baskets, and swallowing red-hot tea brewed by the chief of our kitchens beneath a lean-to of pine branches in the very throat of the tempest. Behind the *berline* the maid's rumble was getting full of snow. It was droll! You must understand the *berline* was honeycombed with drawers and receptacles, and there were supplementary sacks of leather attached everywhere. As to my 'sleeper,' it did not boast so many appendages and *cachettes*; it was much lighter, and lined with—what do you think?—with rose-colored satin—a conceit of my poor husband. It had served us on our honeymoon. And that night he was in a vile humor, thanks to the fact that for the first time in his existence he had been deprived of his indispensable *rastigai*—marrow-filled *patés*—since you do not know Russian, Princess. Oh, but we had ices! . . . Don't laugh, Basil-Vassiliévitch! That cook was a pearl, and with the aid of essences of various fruits and powdered nuts, of which he always took a quantity along, he manufactured a sort of Nesselrode in little moulds. Delicious they were, too, but they did not appease my poor hus-

MOONGLADE

band's wrath concerning those *rastigai*. He told the butler some impatient things when he brought the Nesselrode shapes on a frozen tray, and repented afterward, for he was consummately golden-hearted. I recall that he gave him ten *rubles*—gold—the next morning. We left the *berline* to the girls after that, and took refuge, he and I, in my 'sleeper.' He became quite too amiable then, poor fellow, also he was very handsome, an all-conquering mustache—a leg!—men wore knee-breeches still—but I was adamant. I had to punish him for his previous evil mood, and so I threatened to send him to sleep in the cook's shelter. Ah, the days of our youth . . . how often we regret them!"

Laurence's amazement knew no bounds when she heard the bursts of laughter that followed at her end of the table—echoed *pianissimo* by those below the salt. All this was hardly decent, she thought, for she had a singular fund of prudishness concealed far down below many other more agreeable defects. This old woman, with her angular shoulders, her corded neck and parchmented skin, seemed to her own youth positively odious as she sat enthroned there, flying her arms and bewailing her lost opportunities. She wondered at Basil, who seemed quite touched, and patted almost filially one of the flat wrists, crowded to the elbow with *porte-bonheurs*, that reposed for a fleeting second on the cloth beside him. To Laurence the deeps of those wonderful sapphire eyes that had been always the Countess's sole but very potent beauty, and were still so infinitely expressive and youthful, said nothing at all, although they were just now not quite free from a certain telltale moisture. "An old absurdity," she called the great lady in her own mind, and, like the Nesselrode tray of the defunct Count, she froze up through and through, becoming with every new experience more hostile to the foreign atmosphere surrounding her.

MOONGLADE

The farther she penetrated into the heart of Russia the less she comprehended or liked her new country. Indeed, slowly but surely a sort of abhorrence for everything pertaining to it was rising within her; and her hard face and unsympathetic expression made one young officer on leave murmur to another young officer on leave, who sat beside him at table that night: "I say, Voïnóff, Palitzin's efforts to marry a foreigner are all in vain. He's caught a Tartar, after all!"

The other, whose uniform glittered like sunshine, and whose name was the vernacular for "Warrior," was blessed with one of those meek faces that are greatly confirmed in that expression by sleek, butter-hued hair rigidly parted all the way down the middle, as was his. Also he had a habit of blushing all over his scalp, which made him resemble for minutes at a time what the Italians frivolously call *un piccolo porcellino*. He indulged in one of these manifestations at his comrade's words, adding thereto a smothered squeal of delight, which completed the likeness very neatly.

"I catch you laughing at me, Yégor-Alexandréitch!" Countess Chouróff called out to him. "You think my little stories are not befitting this noble assemblage!"

"It . . . it is Zakbarièf!" choked the youth, getting pinker and pinker under his pale, silky thatch. "He is so funny!"

Zakbarièf tried to protest, but vainly, for Madame Chouróff had already launched herself into another anecdote, and he relapsed into silence, bestowing dagger-like looks upon his grinning brother-at-arms.

Dessert was approaching, heralded by turreted confections, reminding one involuntarily of the glorious ice palace that every winter is built on the Neva; by pyramids of sweet cakes and transparent edifices of jelly which it took two men to carry. According to Russian fashion, the fruit and bonbons and minor toothsome-

MOONGLADE

nesses had had their place on the cloth from the beginning of dinner, cincturing with their appetizing battalions the masses of flowers and feathery foliage forming the center and wings of that opulent display. Lucullus dining with Lucullus could have devised nothing more truly complete.

"You are bored, madame? You think our *agapes* too ostentatious?" The question was asked by Laurence's left-hand neighbor, whom it must be admitted she, in her fault-finding and sulky mood, had absolutely neglected, as she had also her right-hand one, who, by the way, was a corpulent Chouróff, more interested in his plate than in pretty women. To be sure, when the general presentations had been gone through she had not heard either name, and, as if perversely inclined, the little dinner-cards inscribed with them had lain prone on their faces between her cover and theirs. Yet the speaker was not a man to be easily overlooked. Tall, slender, without being in the least thin, he had the most interesting face imaginable: a delicately aquiline face, barred by a long, slender mustache inclining to a light frost of grayness, which was repeated in his thick, short-cut hair. Deep under well-marked brows were what could well have been called, after the fashion of lady-novelists, "eagle's eyes," so penetrating were they, and he wore his dress-coat like a hauberk—a soldier every inch of him, if out of uniform—a Grand Seigneur of olden times in modern mufti.

"Not precisely bored," drawled Laurence, turning languidly toward him. "But a little surprised at what I see. Surely, monsieur, you are not a Russian?"

"I am not, madame, and sometimes I regret it, for they are a great people over here."

"Think so?"

"Yes, madame, I do, from the bottom of my heart, else I would not have married my wife."

MOONGLADE

The taunt did not pierce Laurence's thick vanity and self-righteousness.

"You are wedded to a Russian?" she asked *du bout des lèvres*.

"I am afraid you did not catch my name a while ago, madame. As a matter of fact, I have the honor of being closely related to you—by marriage. I am Salvières."

"*The Duke!*" Laurence exclaimed, with sudden attention, and with the same animation she had displayed when the "Gamin" had mentioned Salvières to her at Plenhœl; for he was a very great personage indeed, even to Laurence's colossal ignorance of the intimate lining of affairs, both social and diplomatic.

He smiled amusedly. "*The Duke!*" he said. "Why, yes, I suppose I can call myself one of the unfortunates so hampered, although why you flatteringly emphasized the article I can't imagine. A greater distinction is mine, as being now your brother-in-law, very much at your service, *belle petite madame!*"

"But where is your wife?"

"Alas! at home, where an incredible variety of occupations detains her."

"What do you call 'at home' when you are here?" she asked. "Madame de Salvières has pretty nearly as many estates as Basil."

Salvières laughed. He had a charming laugh, disclosing beautifully regular teeth. "My dear wife's castle of Palitzinovna—a prolongation of Tverna, so to speak. We are very fond of it."

"How can you, the owner of Salvières, bear to abide in Russia?" Laurence insisted, with deplorable bad taste.

"Decidedly you do not like the White Empire!" he said. "May I be allowed to give you a small paternal hint, which is, do not let Basil notice this too much, or Tatiana, either. She is quick as a flash of lightning, is

MOONGLADE

my blonde beloved, and would resent such heresy, even more than her brother would."

"Heresy! I cannot believe that you mean what you say. I hate Russia, and I don't mind who knows it, Monsieur de Salvières."

"My name, dear madame, to family and friends is Jean—one of Biblical simplicity and easy to remember. May I venture to hope that you will in future deign to use it? Moreover, my character, undistinguished though it be by any startling virtues, is simple also, and I always mean what I say, even if I do not always consider it a duty to say *all* I mean. That is why I spoke of heresy just now. Your new country is delightful, as you will speedily find out for yourself."

"You really like Russia, then?" she questioned, helping herself mechanically to peach-ice. "Yes, Cyprus," she said to the footman behind her.

"I do, very, very much; and so will you when you know it better, I assure you. It is an attaching land, peopled by splendid races, one and all; a place of great deeds, of courageous lives, of extraordinary intellects, talents, and more than talents—achievements. The *mujiks*, I think, are unique in their brave placidity; but they are fighters, too, and mighty good ones, when occasion requires. Look at what Skobéléff could do with them! The nobles are by no means the profligate gamblers and feather-brained spendthrifts they are often supposed to be, but large-hearted gentlemen, devoted to their very arduous duties; and as to the women, rich or poor, patrician, peasant, or bourgeois—you must pardon me if I find it difficult to find words adequate to translate my opinion of them, for they are more than women; companions in the true sense of the word, comrades, counselors—and precious ones at that!"

"This is sheer enthusiasm! How long have you felt all this? Since your marriage?"

MOONGLADE

Salvières smiled. "No," he said, softly, "ever since as a lad I came to visit Basil's grandmother at Tverna—years ago. She was the most exquisite creature one could imagine. Lovely, clever, able, wise, sweet as a flower, and so comprehending, so full of mercy and charity; the courage and spirit of a knight—perfection! Indeed, her personal magnetism and charm were so great that every man who approached her fell in love with her. And how gracefully she used to transform them into lifelong friends! Physically she was a wonder: little hands and feet that were a sculptor's dream, an oval face lighted by violet eyes—yes, violet as the petals of deep larkspur; a mass of undulating hair—white as nacre at thirty, and almost as iridescent, it was so bright—and a poise, a *maintien*. I could become lyrical when I think of that exquisite woman, whom no one has ever quite resembled, excepting, perhaps, Marguerite de Plenhœl. Strangely enough, later on the 'Gamin' will assuredly be a second Véra Petrovna Chemensky. Qualities, manners, virtues, and talents are the same already, and even as she is now she always reminds me strongly of her."

Laurence was looking wide-eyed at him. Was Marguerite de Plenhœl going to pursue her even here? Extremely vexed, she curtly retorted:

"You are lyrical enough, I assure you, to suit any taste, even the famous 'Gamin's'!"

Salvières twirled the ends of his mustache with a familiar gesture. He felt annoyed, not only on account of the slighting reference to Marguerite, not only because he was not accustomed to be spoken to in that peevish manner, but because he was becoming aware of a decided sense of disquiet concerning Basil's future happiness—Basil, who was as near and dear to him as if he had been his blood brother. Jean de Salvières had not expected to find in the twenty-year-old bride of his

MOONGLADE

brother-in-law—who had been described to him as a well-born beauty—so pert and altogether uninhabitable a nature. Beautiful she certainly was—of that there could not be the faintest doubt—but her self-assertion, her cutting way of saying things, and her lack of punctilio, did not impress him as befitting so young a woman, and once again he tugged impatiently at his mustache. He was too frank to attempt playing her at the end of a line with the cunning and *savoir-faire* of an angler (although this would have been easy enough to him) in order to pry more deeply into her character. Moreover, she repelled him. If he liked a person he showed it at once; if he disliked one, he made a point of having nothing more to do with him or with her; but here was a problem not soluble by either plan; for he could neither ignore her nor cast her aside, owing to many reasons, chief among which was the dawning conviction that in Basil's interest it would be well if he followed up Laurence a little, helped her if he could, advised her, certainly.

He and his wife had been in India on a pleasure trip at the time of the marriage, and his surprise at what he now discovered was painful.

"The *famous* 'Gamin'!" he said, speculatively. "Why famous? Has that dear little thing rendered herself guilty of any more heroic deeds since I last had the happiness of seeing her?"

"Heroic deeds? I was not aware she dealt in that sort of thing!" said Laurence, who for so lofty a soul was now within measurable distance of snappishness, and she looked at Salvières with a severity indicative of an intention to keep him strictly in his place. Yet had she taken the trouble to do so, she might have realized that she sat in the presence of that rare and indefinable creation—a strong man, whom no feminine trickery could find at any moment off his guard.

MOONGLADE

"I beg your pardon," he quietly replied. "She frequently, on the contrary, deals in such things. Only a few months ago she jumped into the sea from a high rock—a very high rock, understand—to save from drowning a silly gawk of a ship's boy. Half a gale was blowing at the time, and it was something more than a man's ordinary risk for her to take."

Laurence's eyelids fluttered, but she did not actually raise her eyes to the uncomfortable neighbor whose simple directness of speech found no favor in her sight.

"Really!" she remarked. "I never heard of it!"

"It is your loss then, madame, and I am glad to have been so fortunate as to repair this lack of knowledge on your part."

She made a grimace expressive of real annoyance. "I am not much of a gossip," she shrugged, "and therefore never greatly given to listen to it."

"That being the case," retorted Salvières, "we may remain hopeful that this will go no further. Good actions are best left out of general conversation, excepting in such particular cases as this one. They are so seldom credited." ["Why in the world does she hate the 'Gam-in'?" he was asking himself. "What has the poor child done to her?"]

"You seem very fond of Marguerite de Plenhœl?" Laurence remarked. "Everybody I know appears to have some weakness or other for her, and yet she is really nothing extraordinary!"

"Perhaps that might explain it," he said. "You see, she is simplicity itself, without pose of any sort, but also very bright and clever; also she is gay and brave—Heaven help her!"

"If she is all that, why should Heaven need to interfere?"

Salvières was again thoughtfully twisting his mustache. Decidedly this new relative of his was not im-

MOONGLADE

proving on better acquaintance. Unhappy Basil! When the scales—thick as window-shutters he was forced to believe—fell from his eyes, what would he do?

"Heaven," he said, slowly, "must always interfere with its own, although God forbid that I should attempt to explain to you the ways of Providence."

"You evidently consider Marguerite an angel, then?" Laurence queried, in an odd voice.

"Oh, by no means! She has faults, great faults, not the least of them being her over-confidence in others."

"You know her very well, I suppose?"

"As well as one knows a creature one has carried about in one's arms before it could walk," he acquiesced.

"As long as that? I heard that you were personally related to her, but not very closely."

"She is my niece, *à la mode de Bretagne par alliance*," he explained.

"Oh, that accounts for your enthusiasm, I suppose," Laurence proposed, with a pale smile. "One is apt to be more or less proud of what belongs to one, whether *par alliance* or otherwise."

"Not always!" he vigorously rejoined. "Ah! *Sapristi!* Not always, I assure you! (Can she be stupid into the bargain?" he mused. "That would be a superfetation of calamities!") And as Countess Chouróff was rising, he pushed back his chair and drew Laurence's out of the way of her train, while she moved at his side with that subtle rustle of superfine silken linings that conveys even to the dullest masculine mind an especial care for dress and the wisdom of dealing with a great *couturier*.

In any other case, Salvières could in all probability have dismissed from his mind the thoroughly disagreeable quarter of an hour he had just passed, but this was impossible for him to do. His keen eyes unrolled before him a long and dark array of eminently unpleasant possibilities, not concerning him or his wife, pre-

MOONGLADE

cisely, and yet liable to make things a bit dreary for both of them.

"How do you like her?"

The question took him by surprise as he was escaping from the concert-room, to which the Countess's guests were being marshaled, and, turning quickly, he found his brother-in-law at his elbow.

"Like whom?" he demanded, eager to gain time.

"Why, my wife, of course!" Basil answered. "I saw you chatting nineteen to the dozen with her, until the end of the Pantagruelian feast Madame Chouróff euphemistically calls a simple little dinner."

"She is remarkably beautiful," Salvières sincerely approved. "Indeed, I find that the portraits you sent us were far from doing her justice."

Curiously enough, this time Basil did not flush with gratification, as when Régis de Plenhôel had been the appraiser; instead, an almost worried expression overcast his features.

"Come here, Jean!" he said, drawing Salvières into the billiard-room, which was entirely unoccupied at the moment, and both men seated themselves upon a broad, mellow divan far away from the central hanging-lamps.

"I don't wish," Basil said at once, "simply to know how you like Laurence's looks—that is not necessary. I am anxious—very anxious to hear what else you have to say about her. Between you and me there has always existed a sympathy and a comprehension greater than ordinary *camaraderie*, and that is why I don't scruple to question you as I do. What do you think of Laurence, and what do you think Tatiana will think of her—which," he concluded, "makes many 'thinks' in one request."

"Plain speaking and clear understanding. An exchange without robbery! Eh?"

"Exactly!"

"Humm . . . m! I wonder if in this all-blessed corner

MOONGLADE

I could venture to light my pipe?" And Salvières peeped cautiously round the open panel of the door. "There's nobody about, as far as I can see," he laughed, "and you know that I do not consider digestion perfect without a few whiffs of my trusty briar." He was watching Basil covertly as he spoke, and was somewhat relieved to see the strained expression of his eyes relax a little.

"I know. You're lucky that Tatiana does not object to such a pernicious habit," he interposed; "but there is nothing to 'oxidize' here, fortunately."

"Your sister," the Duke averred, "is too fine a woman to object to anything I fancy. She's true blue, like all the Palitzins. But what's that you were saying about oxidizing?"

"Nothing! Nothing! I was thinking of something else," Basil hastily rejoined, repressing his untimely flash of memory, as he continually repressed similar ones. "Light your pipe first, and answer my question as soon as you have satisfied your brutal instincts," he concluded, with a praiseworthy effort at banter.

"Your question? Oh! Yes, of course!" dallied Salvières. "Well, it is not possible for me to give you a very complete opinion after ten minutes' conversation with a lovely woman, my dear Basil. It is too large an order for yours truly."

He gave a wave of the hand descriptive of intricate complexities *ad infinitum*, and, deliberately leaning back on the luxurious cushions of the divan, began to puff at his trusty briar.

"Nevertheless," Basil said, frowning, "if you had something agreeable to say, you wouldn't need half a dozen personal interviews to do so. It is first impressions that count."

"Not a bit of it!" Salvières contradicted. "Were you to ask my opinion of a passer-by—Lord, I hope there is nobody around"—he interrupted himself, glancing at his

MOONGLADE

pipe with mock apprehension—"I would satisfy your curiosity at once; but when it comes to passing judgment upon so considerable a personage as the Princess Basil Palitzin, my sister-in-law and your wife, words become momentous; although this does not exclude my assuring you that I found her interesting beyond all expression!"

Basil, who was smoking a cigarette—a dainty Russian affair all white and gold, and long, hard mouthpiece—brusquely threw it into an ash-tray.

"I am glad you found her interesting," he put in, with averted eyes, "but there are a good many ways of being interesting. Why don't you speak out? Surely it is natural for me to ask you how you like my wife!"

Salvières sat suddenly up, drew his long legs under him tailor fashion, and stared at his friend and brother, rocking softly backward and forward as he did so.

"My dear boy," he said at last, "of course it is natural, but I cannot understand why you seem so worried about my opinion. I have just told you that I find your wife both surpassingly beautiful and extremely interesting. What more can I say à première vue?"

Basil took a fresh cigarette, lighted it from the still burning stump on the tray, and gazed for a moment at the ends of his pumps, as though noticing something amiss with those irreproachable articles of footwear.

"Do you think," he suddenly asked, with apparent irrelevance, "that perhaps I did a foolish, an unwise, or even a cruel thing in separating her from her friends, her country, her pleasures, and in bringing her to live at Tverna?"

"A woman shall forsake her family, her land, and her own surroundings, to cleave to her husband, quoth Holy Scripture!" Salvières pronounced, severely.

"It does nothing of the kind! It is the other way about. It is the husband who is particularly mentioned," Basil contradicted, unable to repress a smile.

MOONGLADE

"Oh! It works both ways undoubtedly! Behold me, who spend nearly the half of every year over here. Besides, not being me, or an Irishman, I presume it isn't your intention to become an absentee landlord?"

"No, naturally not, but I do not think Laurence likes Russia. She does not complain, you understand, but I cannot help noticing—"

"I believe you, my boy," commented Salvières, inwardly. And then as the pause threatened to draw to an embarrassing length, he quietly remarked: "She'll get used to the change after a while, never fear. Women are eminently adaptable, and, given the merely nominal duties she will encounter, and the enormous advantages that will counterbalance these, you ought not to worry yourself about the result!"

"But that is just the devil of it!" Basil exclaimed. "She does not understand those duties you are pleased to call nominal, but are as a matter of fact very serious. She's afraid—I honestly believe—of the people! You see, she has heard all her life in England that we Russians are a bloodthirsty, violent race, capable of any evil; so what will you? Poor child, the isolation, perhaps even the 'grandeur' of her new position, are weighing upon her!"

"Nonsense! Who's afraid?" Salvières said, with some irritation. "She, the daughter of a line of sailors and soldiers, the granddaughter of that old fire-eater, Admiral Seton, the 'Oror of the Horient—as they nicknamed him at Alexandria! Bah! Try and make some one else believe that!"

"Physically afraid, of course not! Morally afraid, yes!" asserted Basil, straightening himself. "We are having some little trouble over at Tverna just now, as you know; a mere trifle not worthy of serious consideration; but, strangely enough, it makes her nervous. She has not caught on since our arrival there. Imagine, she considered it quite improper when old General Hiltròw

MOONGLADE

knelt on the threshold of the drawing-room and kissed her hands in greeting, awaiting the kiss on the brow that is customary here, though I had warned her of all these things. The people all and sundry were ready enough to prostrate themselves at her feet, but"—he hesitated, cleared his throat, and glanced appealingly at his relative—"but," he continued, seeing Salvières raise his shoulders ever so slightly, "but she drew away from them—no, I don't quite mean that—rather she showed her—her indifference—a little too plainly. For instance, she takes no interest in the sick, the ailing, the unhappy; she never sets foot in an *isba*; she has handed over the key of the pharmacy to the housekeeper, a thing never heard of in mother's time; and when the land-steward or the *staròstá* come in quest of remedies, delicacies, or any of the many comforts we always provide, she sends them word that she does not know what they want—which is true enough, of course—and that they must not bother her."

"You should teach her to do better!" Salvières hazarded.

"But—my dear fellow," Basil began, "I am not inclined to make her life here a misery."

"Then don't complain," was the cool rejoinder. "Let her have her head; bid her amuse herself in her own way, encourage her to see and receive people of her own choice, and thereby obtain peace—that most desirable of possessions!"

"It is not everybody's privilege, after all, to know by instinct how to treat the lower classes," Basil said, irritably, "or to become popular, and to find the secret of assuring a number of unprepossessing and almost total strangers that one remembers them individually and perfectly!"

"Yet that is just what we must do, if we seek popularity. Besides which popularity means—plus a cruel

MOONGLADE

strain on the digestive organs—a deep pocket—which your wife fortunately has—and the patience of an archangel—although Archangel Michael does not give the impression of extreme longanimity. Neither does your wife, if I judge her aright.”

“There’s no earthly use in joking, Jean! Try and help me, rather, for, to tell you the truth, I’m a little at a loss what to do. If I yield to her unspoken wishes, and take her away, it means utter ruin to all my plans, my projects, and also to the welfare of my people. And if I do not yield—”

“Don’t yield on that point, Basil!” Salvières quickly interrupted. “Don’t take her away. It won’t do. No, certainly not; it won’t do, for her, for you, or for them.”

“I know; I feel just as you do about it, but what then?”

Salvières gave a sharp sigh, then he laughed; but his laugh was not easy, and at last he spread out both arms in a gesture almost of discouragement.

“You are letting yourself be driven into an *impasse*, my dear Basil,” he said, gravely. “A very dangerous proceeding. You ask me to help you. You know that I’m only too ready to do so. But how the deuce am I to get about it? Let me see. How long have you been at Tverna now?”

“A little over two months.”

“That all! Well, you surely did not expect a *mondaine* like your wife to get accustomed to your citadel in so short a time. Still, what do you say to Tatiana and myself coming to stay for a couple of weeks or so with you? Tatiana is the most capable manager ever created for the joy of this world, and her advice might work wonders. She is to the manner born, and I think she wouldn’t mind teaching your beautiful Laurence how to go about it on an estate as large and difficult to rule as a whole province.”

Basil turned upon Salvières a pair of rather hopeless eyes.

MOONGLADE

"Do you think they would go well in double harness, those two?" he asked, diffidently. "Besides, Laurence is a little impatient of advice."

Salvières reflected before replying. "I dare say! And whether she would get along with Tatiana—that's the question!" He knocked the ashes out of his cold pipe, and thoughtfully replaced this object of his affections in its chamois-lined *étui*. "I bought this delightful article on the Jarozolinskà in Warsaw," he casually remarked, "where it is claimed that the shops are better than in Paris. Lord! Moreover, the man who sold it to me said, with a lugubrious grin on his foolish Teutonic face, that this was the finest pipe ever made; and he was right, curiously enough, for I never had a better one. However, to return to our muttons, or rather to our lambkins: I'm afraid, Basil, that perhaps you are by way of building molehills into very tall mountains. You would scarcely have enjoyed a strong-minded, assertive wife—a leader at home and afield, violently interested in politics of every caliber, a platform orator, bowing from the waist up to admiring multitudes—*i. e.*, the sort that so many unfortunate husbands are trying to get used to nowadays."

Basil could not restrain a laugh. "My dear fellow," he said, "I do not ask so much. You know very well that I consider men who help women to make fools of themselves unmanly crawlers. But between that and complete indifference to the masses—since you force me to adopt that jargon—there is a yawning gulf."

"I dare say," Salvières was beginning, when Countess Chouróff's deep bass made itself heard at the door, and that lady, followed by four yards of purple-velvet draperies, advanced into the room and faced the two absconders.

"I have lived for years," she exclaimed, "under the impression that I saw in you gentlemen an overworked Rus-

MOONGLADE

sian proprietor and a French Seigneur, overworked also, but in wifely interests. I apologize for my mistake; you are merely a couple of idlers, confirmed in that same lamentable sloth that enables men of the south to do nothing, very gracefully, for long hours at a time."

"What procures us this withering indictment?" Salvières protested, laughing. "Remember, dear lady, that it is months—months since the rights of brotherhood have been exercised between Basil and myself! Would you proscribe them beneath your hospitable roof?"

"And what about the rights of my guests to the companionship of the two most important and—let me add—the two most agreeable personalities beneath the roof you invoke?" she replied, with spirit. "Give me your arm, Salvières; and as to you, Basil-Vassiliévitch, seek the protection of your own wife from the ides of my wrath. She is looking for you, anyhow," she concluded, returning to a simpler form of address.

"Salvières," she ruefully whispered in the ducal ear almost on a level with her mouth—for she was a remarkably tall woman—"that young and strangely disquieting couple need watching, or we will see them upset by the roadside."

Salvières started a little and stared surprisedly at her.

"What makes you think that?" he asked, irritably, for his nerves were beginning to be jangled.

"Intuition, assisted by clear sight and miles of experience," she said, gravely. "That sweet girl in there," and she pointed to the buzzing drawing-room—which she often playfully alluded to as the *sala-del-trono*, because it was only thrown open on solemn occasions—"has been purposely created to cause the downfall of great and good men. Remember what I say. Some day, perhaps not so very distant, you'll find that I'm no idle prophet."

CHAPTER XI

My house and all it holds is thine,
But your deeds shall be no guests of mine.

TVERNA, 12th of May.

MY DEAR RÉGIS,—I must apologize, and apologize humbly, for not having answered your letter sooner. To tell you the truth, we have “enjoyed”—as your Breton peasants say—some rather unquiet times here. When we first came, as you know, I found my “vassals” a trifle out of hand, but, after all, very reasonably so. Unfortunately the spirit of the age—or whatever you call it—has never ceased seeping through our marches—I should say marshes, the season being peculiarly rainy—and thus has my time been strenuously taken up by what I may term salvage-work, to the almost complete exclusion of any pleasanter occupation—this, of course, includes writing to those I love. In spite of the above-mentioned drawbacks, I am hale and hearty enough—that is to say that the years have not as yet left a serious mark upon me! Of course it is a great deprivation to abandon the sojourns abroad I used to delight in, but you see there is no choice in the matter. We spend a month or two every season in the Crimea, where the estates, of course, also demand the weary and wary eye of the master, but this cannot veraciously be described as a vacation, since work, work, work, is the keynote of my stay there. I wish I could have induced you to stop with us for a few weeks at least, during your trip around the world. How interested my cousin Marguerite must have been by this charming voyage. I hope she is well, and you also, my good Régis. Has she outgrown the “Gamin” stage? I can scarcely believe it of her—she is so essentially and delightfully young. And now I come to the heart of my letter, as it were. Laurence has for a long time, I fear, been homesick—

MOONGLADE

I believe she never was anything else—as it is quite natural she should be, at so grim a distance from her own country. She is planning an expedition to the banks of the Thames, and I would willingly accompany her, but duty forbids so unlandlordly a thought, and so she will probably travel with Tatiana and Salvières, arriving in “Europe”—she insists that Russia is in no wise included in that division of the globe—some time in late June. After much reflection I have decided to let the boy accompany his mother, in the care of his *niania*, who has my absolute confidence. My occupations are such that I could not be much with him during Laurence’s absence. I am not certain whether a sojourn in England would suit him. He is, as you know, my treasure of treasures, and since you tell me that you intend leaving Paris for Plenhœl in June, could I, upon the strength of our long and loyal friendship, venture to impose yet another duty upon you? Perhaps you will think it pleasant. You are so kind-hearted. It is, namely, to accept my little Piotr as your guest, or rather charge, while Laurence visits her friends. The *niania* and my faithful old Garrassime, who never leaves him, will be responsible for his behavior. Am I too indiscreet? I think not, provided my cousin Marguerite pleads my cause with you. Tell her that I send Piotr to her as a little messenger from afar, a playfellow, or a toy, according to choice. He is very advanced for his age (all paternal pride laid aside), even too much so—which is one of the reasons why I think that a thorough change will be good for him—very advanced indeed, and sometimes preternaturally solemn, as his eminently Slav nature inclines him to be, not to mention some decidedly British and splenetic strain, inherited, doubtless, from some maternal ancestor or other.

I am waiting your reply very anxiously, and remain, my dear Régis,

Your devoted friend and cousin,

BASIL.

Marguerite, curled up on an uncompromisingly bamboo lounge in the flower-gallery of the Hôtel de Plenhœl—where five years before she had bidden Basil farewell—was reading for the tenth time at least Basil’s letter, received some days before. Her father had answered it

MOONGLADE

by return post—of course in the affirmative—and ever since then Marguerite had been preparing to receive her youthful guest.

At twenty-one the "Gamin" was still the "Gamin" of yore. To the eye she had not changed at all, yet she was more than ever the "Moonglade" of her cousin's fancy, by right of some quality as apparent as the path of its transmission to the observer was obscure. She was the picture of ethereal health—if one may thus express oneself—so delicately tinted was her little person, so gravely sweet her eyes. The rose hue of her skin was the exact color of those tiny waxen blossoms the Bretons call *fleurs-de-Jesus*, that have but the very faintest hint of a blush beneath their white surface. Her hair was the same pale-golden nimbus as when she left her convent, but she wore it differently now—more smoothly coiled around her small head. In one word, there was about her a sort of crystalline aureole that set her apart from other beings. "Antinoüs," if questioned, would have asserted—and with truth—that she was the "jolliest little chap" in creation, though a finer observer might have maintained that her laughter was often from the lips only and not from the eyes—those eyes that at this moment, while she was alone with Basil's letter, were not entirely dry. Once or twice she breathed quickly, impatiently, as she thought of all that had happened. Indeed, the past years had sometimes been hard to get through with. She knew without the possibility of a doubt that Basil was not happy. She had never been told so, but, nevertheless, she knew! Had it been otherwise the "Gamin," the gay and brave according to Jean de Salvières, would have felt differently, and accepted life and its burdens easily enough. Unfortunately, it cost her, in the light of this intuitive knowledge, a good deal of energy to do so, and her oft-repeated silent vows to think no more about it were writ in water.

MOONGLADE

She was looking forward with suppressed delight to the arrival of Piotr. Was he like his father, or his beautiful mother? she wondered. Marguerite adored children—especially little boys—and here again she was swayed by a clear-sightedness far beyond her age, for the modern little girl did not please her, less because of what they really are than on account of what they are bound to become—pleasure-loving, noisy, untutored beings, now that the wholesome principles of other times have been trampled under foot, and the fad for feminine “emancipation” has become the most dangerous craze the world has ever known.

The Hôtel de Plenhœl was *en fête*, and decked with flowers as for some royal reception; toys of superfine quality and astounding quantity were piled up in Marguerite’s personal salon to greet the baby prince, and all the morning Marguerite herself had flitted to and fro, up and down stairs, to arrange and prepare.

In an hour she would be with her father at the terminus, awaiting the private car attached to the express bringing Laurence and her suite, Piotr and his own. How large and magnificent that sounded! She suddenly laughed, pocketed Basil’s epistle, and jumped to her feet, ready for action. “Poor little boy!” she mechanically murmured. “I must hurry!” But why poor? She could not have said why, though instinctively she pitied the child—and pity is akin to love.

In her fresh summer frock of white *piqué*, a white-banded sailor-hat on her golden locks that seemed to shine as through a wash of silver, a knot of Malmaison carnations thrust through her waist-ribbon, she looked indeed exquisitely young as she stood beside “Antinoüs,” inside the station. He, too, had not altered, and was still the *beau garçon*, full of chic and vim, who conquered all hearts at the point of his blond mustache. There was a white carnation in his coat, and his straw

MOONGLADE

hat, set at the exactly correct angle, gave him an almost boyish appearance.

In a few minutes the corridor-train came puffing up the shining metals in the wake of its spick-and-span locomotive, and the doors of the waiting-rooms were thrown wide. Marguerite had paled a trifle as she advanced to the private car (beside which now stood a Kossák of the Russian Embassy in his dressing-gown of a coat, all brilliant with silver, holding high his astrakhaned head), and saw a graceful, languid figure wrapped in diaphanous veils, assisted to alight. Behind her came the towering form of old Garrassime, carrying in his arms a boy of startling beauty. "Antinoüs," hat in hand, was already bowing before Laurence, who, disentangling a slim, gloved hand from her many dust-draperies, allowed him to press it to his lips.

"And here is Marguerite!" she drawled, as if surprised to see her there. "Grown old and wise, eh?" she continued, shaking hands limply and taking Régis's arm.

"How are you, Laurence?" replied the "Gamin," quietly. "Can I be of any use?" She was burning to take hold of Piotr, whose great dark eyes were scanning her from head to foot, but she had long since learned how to restrain her first impulses.

"You are too kind!" Laurence said, speaking "from the top of the head" (*du haut de la tête*), as the French say. She was *the Princess* and no mistake—perhaps even a little too much so—the conventional Princess of comedy and fiction as ordinary people understand her; but, after all, a very gracious presentment thereof, and Marguerite studiously refrained from smiling. "Yes, if you don't mind, *ma cousine*," Laurence continued, dwelling heavily upon this badge of kinship. "Tell them to carry the boy to your carriage—you have one in waiting, I suppose, have you not, Marquis?" she asked, turning to Régis. "And since you are so kind as to receive him and his

people, I will only trouble you to take me as far as the equipage from the Embassy that is here for me!"

"Will you not honor us by residing under our roof?" asked Régis, inwardly wondering how long he would find it possible to continue using such very lofty language.

"Oh, thanks muchly . . . you are very thoughtful; but you see my stay here will be but a few days. I am going on to London almost at once. It would not be worth while disturbing you, and I assure you that your amiability to the boy will fully suffice. Besides, I have promised their Excellencies Count and Countess Melidóff to be their guest. I was to have traveled with my sister and brother-in-law de Salvières, and stayed with them here; but at the last they altered their plans, which altered mine also."

Régis, snubbed and delighted, was about to walk on with her, when she turned her eyes royally toward the still-saluting Kossák, and said a few words to him in vile Russian. The man's impassive face did not indicate comprehension, and to Laurence's evident amazement Marguerite fluently repeated the order.

"Marguerite speaks Russian?" she asked, acidly, dropping all her languor.

"At your service, madame," Régis replied, laughing. "And so do I; but as to the 'Gamin,' she is the finest linguist in Europe, with all her little modest airs."

Princess Laurence moved on in brisker fashion, barely replying to Marguerite's *au revoir*, and then only did the girl turn to Garrassime and his charge.

"Oh, you beauty!" she said, in a slightly unsteady voice, holding out both arms to Basil's son.

"I'll come to you," the child lisped in French (much to his stalwart attendant's surprise, for he was not easy), and he allowed himself to be taken up by Marguerite and kissed over and over again.

MOONGLADE

Régis was already returning, curbing with considerable difficulty a violent desire to laugh.

"*Qu'est-ce qu'elle a cette cruche?*" he whispered to his daughter as they settled themselves in the victoria with Piotr enthroned between them; then, noticing the boy's observant eye, he continued in Spanish—a language they were both fond of using: "No wonder Basil writes so mournfully! Poor devil! Did you ever see such insufferable airs as that girl thinks it necessary to put on?"

Marguerite gave him a supremely roguish glance, imperceptibly raised one shoulder, and resumed her contemplation of the "little messenger from afar," whose presence near her was such a pleasure, and who, to give him his due, was doing everything in his unconscious power to get himself adored in short order.

She was not, however, at the end of her surprises, for next morning bright and early, while superintending Monsieur Piotr's toilet, she received a hurried scrawl from Laurence's Serene-Highness, declining rather curtly a formal invitation to dinner at the Hôtel de Plenhœl, but asking Marguerite if she could "lend" her one of her salons for that same night to receive a few intimate friends, "as," she ingenuously added, "I will feel much freer there as a hostess than if using the suite placed at my disposal by the Russian Ambassador." There was not a word for or about Piotr, and the reader's brows came rather brusquely together as she read.

Though she had retained all the untouched innocence of a highly bred French girl, Marguerite was no fool, and instantly scented something or other behind this strangely worded request—something that was not—well—not quite correct.

"Is the bearer waiting?" she asked of the footman at the dressing-room door.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Tell him to keep on waiting, please," and with an

MOONGLADE

excuse to Piotr—who in his new-born enthusiasm was not minded to let her out of his sight—she hurried to her father's study.

"Papa," she said, a little breathlessly, "here's a note from Laurence. What do you wish me to do about it?"

Régis ran his eye over the penetratingly perfumed sheet, and said nothing.

"Well," repeated the "Gamin," "what do you wish me to do, papa?"

"Say yes," Régis replied, "but understand me, *Chevalier*, you are under no circumstances to be present when she comes to-night. Madame Laurence gives me the impression of having become even something more of a— a difficulty than she was as Mademoiselle Seton! I will for once—yes, for once—accept the responsibility of what she calls a reunion of her intimate friends. We shall see, or, rather, I shall see, what she means by it, but—"

He impulsively drew his daughter down, kissed her very tenderly, and let her go, and, smothering an expletive meant for Laurence, subsided into his arm-chair. After she had gone he sat quite still, plunged in profound thought, a most unusual proceeding for him. The "*Chevalier Gamin*" had never caused him one moment's anxiety since, when orphaned in her cradle, she had become his dearest and most pressing preoccupation. But just now he suddenly perceived that there might be rocks ahead, such as had never yet disturbed the smooth current of his guardianship of her. Five years ago her return from the convent had been an unmixed and unspeakable joy. Nevertheless, had Basil asked him for her hand then, his great affection and esteem for his kinsman, coupled with a firmly rooted conviction that women can never marry too young, would have won his consent. Indeed, more than once, when seeing them so completely happy in each other's company, he had deemed

MOONGLADE

it by no means improbable that such a demand might soon be made. But when a very blind Fate ordained otherwise, and the ever-cheerful "Gamin" had remained to fill the old château with the rustle of her flying skirts, the music of her laughter, he had resolutely dismissed his guileless dream, and had been only too well content to keep with him this charming little *compagnon de route*. They had been thenceforth more like brother and sister than father and daughter. Together they had ridden and driven, yachted and swum, fenced and shot, and more lately they had undertaken that long voyage around the world—not as globe-trotters, bent upon engulfing as large a mass of indigestible and subsequently undigested facts and adventures as might be encompassed during a breathless race against time and tide, but as finely equipped *dilettanti*, who take pleasure in lingering over the savor of their every sensation; stopping here and there with album and palette—Marguerite never liked the merciless precision of even the best photograph—pausing a few extra days by the way to hear some celebrated musician, or witness a characteristic folk *fête*; losing themselves in jungles; dallying in wild regions to try their guns at big game; and being received everywhere with *empressement* and "distinguished consideration"—as the French love to put it. It had been an ideal two years of vagabondage; during which they had more often than not slept under tents, taken their meals *al fresco*, and sat together by camp-fires under the star-sown violet skies of extraordinarily lovely regions; always accompanied by Madame Hortense, as Marguerite's *dueña*, and by François, Régis's man, who had been with his master ever since regimental days in Algeria.

Now this all-play-and-no-work existence had come to an end, much to their regret, but they had many things of a pleasant kind to look forward to, including the coming months by the Breton sea. And, after all, reflected

MOONGLADE

Régis, here was his lovely daughter still unwed at her majority. She had calmly and persistently declined all offers (and these had been many), arguing that she could never find a man worthy of comparison with her father and that she was too happy as she was to admit of any change. In all his knowledge, a woman of his race had never remained single after seventeen, and he suddenly drew his hand across his forehead as if to dismiss an unfortunate thought buzzing around his brain.

After a time he rose and strode to one of the windows giving on the garden. The weather was admirable, the sky of indescribable purity, the huge lindens skirting the walls were loaded down with little tufts of perfume, and the grass, still empearled with dew where the sun did not strike, was enameled with scores of little golden planets—dandelions defended by the “Gamin,” who loved them, from the gardener’s spudder—and further embellished by a flight of familiar doves who lived in an ivy-garlanded cote near by.

On the middle of the lawn he saw the “Gamin” holding a flat basket from which Piotr—a charming little figure in his *mujik* costume, imitated in white drill, his tiny tall boots and jaunty cap—snatched handfuls of crumbs for the hungry birds. Moodily Régis took in the pretty scene. Why was not this baby his grandson? Why—now that he thought of it—had Basil not married Marguerite instead of that infernal *poseuse* of a Laurence? He a grandfather! The idea made him laugh—he felt so absurdly young—and he stepped back to glance at himself in a mirror! Slender and active as at twenty, with not one line of white to pale his corn-colored pate, he gave no idea of grandfatherly dignity. But, never mind, it would have been pleasant, all the same, and he shrugged an impatient shoulder.

A shriek of delight from Piotr on the lawn brought him quickly again to the open window. The child was run-

MOONGLADE

ning toward the stooping doves, clapping his pudgy hands to frighten them away from their breakfast, and Marguerite on silent feet was skimming across the turf after him.

"Naughty, naughty Piotr!" she cried, catching him before much harm was done, and bearing him away from the whirling flock. "You must not give sorrow to the birds!" ("*faire du chagrin aux petits oiseaux.*")

Kicking and struggling vigorously, Piotr heeded not at all the wise admonition. "Naughty Malou!" he yelled, vainly trying to break her hold. "Naughty Malou, let Piotr go!"

Marguerite's laughter rippled under the drooping linden branches, in her delight at the pretty perversion of her name.

"No! No!" she panted, for the boy was heavy, "Malou will not let Piotr go! What would your papa say if he saw you frightening my birds, Piotr? What do you think? Eh?"

At the mention of his father Piotr grew still and glanced up at Marguerite between his long dark lashes.

"Piotr loves papa!" he stoutly declared in Russian. "Piotr wants to see papa, not mamma. Piotr hates mamma!"

"Oh, baby!" exclaimed the deeply shocked Marguerite. "You mustn't say that! Your mamma is so beautiful!"

She had put him down on the gravel walk under Régis's window; but she did not see her father, who had dropped the lace curtain before him. He was curious to see how this would end.

"Malou is beautiful, not mamma!" the young insubordinate gravely responded, planted in front of his new passion, both small fists clenched and hanging at his sides. "Mamma scolds Piotr always. Ask Garrassime. Bring him here, Malou; and ask *niania*, too!"

Marguerite glanced quickly toward the house. The

MOONGLADE

niania (nurse) was not in sight; but Garrassime, the ever-faithful, who never remained far away from his beloved charge, was lurking behind a clump of rhododendrons, and at a sign from her advanced and uncovered his gray head.

"Does Prince Pierre often talk like this?" she asked, rather sadly.

"Alas! Your Nobility," the old servitor replied, "it does happen; I grieve to say. Your Excellency must pardon him, he means no harm. He does not understand what he says."

Piotr, sitting flat on the gravel, was engrossed in manufacturing a miniature mountain with the end of a bit of stick escaped from the gardener's rake, and had evidently forgotten all about the discussion in hand.

The "Gamin" smiled up at Garrassime in the fashion which invariably enslaved all beholders. "Oh!" she said, half-voicedly—she did not want Piotr to hear. "I did not mean it as a reproach, Garrassime, but does not your mistress resent such sayings?"

The old man raised his eyes imploringly to the blue sky above. "When she hears! When she hears!" he murmured. "But The Illustrious sees little of the boy, Your Nobility. He is mostly with the Prince at home, or with me or his *niania*. He is a noble child, but vivacious and fond of his own way."

"I see!" comprehended Marguerite. "He is very winsome, very handsome. Do you think, Garrassime, that he will not pine for his father?"

The servitor of the House of Palitzin for forty loyal years looked steadily at his master's young cousin and nodded his wise head.

"He would without doubt have done so, were it not for Your Nobility. It is strange, for he does not make friends easily, and yet not so strange," he added, his eyes fixed upon her; "but he has of a certainty given his

MOONGLADE

blessed little heart into Your Nobility's keeping, Excellency. God be praised for it! We will have no trouble now. He is very like his illustrious father," he concluded, almost in a whisper, and Régis from behind his curtain saw a slow flush of deep rose spread over his "Gamin's" fair face.

"*Je ne suis décidément qu'un imbécile!*" he apostrophized himself wrathfully, and noiselessly he quitted his post of observation. He had seen enough, and more than enough!

At ten o'clock that night the Marquis de Plenhœl descended the *perron* steps to hand Laurence from her coupé. She was marvelously gowned in dying-azure coruscated with diamond stars, and with loose-locked clusters of lilac orchids playing hide-and-seek in the lace of her train. She gave a rapid glance about her as she was being ceremoniously conducted to the great salon on the first floor, and when Régis bowed her in she asked, with an equivocal smile that made him writhe internally:

"Where is Marguerite?"

"Up-stairs in her own apartments," he said, shortly, "taking a cup of tea with our old friend Madame de Montemare—I think you met her here some five years ago."

"I think I remember the occasion," Laurence acquiesced without much enthusiasm; "and tell me, Cousin Régis"—this was the first time she had thus honored him—"is Marguerite . . . are they coming down later?"

"No," Régis responded. "Marguerite does not like society; and as to Madame de Montemare, she claims that her circle of acquaintances is already too large, so she firmly refuses to increase it."

"Too bad! Too bad!" Laurence remarked, with a faint sigh of relief, her brilliant eyes roving over the magnificent drawing-room with its Louis XIV. furniture and

MOONGLADE

tapestries lighted by many antique lamps, and wax candles in sconces and appliques half drowned in verdure and flowers.

"It is charming here!" she approved. "So mellow and *distingué*; different, altogether different from any place I know."

Régis smiled a mere smile and bowed a little bow that vexed Laurence, in spite of her lovely thick skin.

"You are very good!" the master of this "mellow" and "*distingué*" establishment admitted. "It has the merit of antiquity in a time altogether too modern—according to my poor views at least."

"You are a hardened Royalist!" she observed, with the least suspicion of a sneer. "A lover of all that no longer exists."

"And you, madame, are assuredly Imperial and modern à *outrance*!" he retorted with another bow.

"In Russia one has to be an Imperialist," she said, densely; "but politics do not interest me."

"Even in Russia?" he asked, curiously.

"Especially there!" she said, quickly, an expression of mingled fear and disgust flitting over her features.

He was looking down at her where she sat on a low ottoman almost at his feet, and the extreme décolletage of her sumptuous gown amazed him. "I am glad I did not let my *Chevalier* see her; she's getting quite brazen!" he thought, and added aloud, in order to say something, "That must sound odd to the Russian-speaking ear!"

She clapped her gloved hands. "Oh!" she said. "Delicious! That is the finest Irish bull I ever heard."

He laughed a bit awkwardly. "I beg your pardon," he apologized. "I was not thinking of what I was saying."

"So I perceive," she returned, and, rising quickly, she added: "I think I hear a motor stopping. Some of my friends, probably."

"Probably," he assented. "So permit me to take

MOONGLADE

leave of you for the present. Pray command me if I can do anything else. There are, I believe, some—refreshments prepared in the adjoining room, and the butler is in attendance.”

“But,” she murmured, showing embarrassment for the first time, “are you not going to be one of us? It—it would not disturb me.”

“Thank you for this kindly assurance.” He bowed low as he spoke, and without another word made his exit by a side-door, leaving her to go forward and greet whoever it was that was coming.

At the farther end of the drawing-room was a carved balcony where some tall palms and ferns stood, which was reached by an outer staircase. There, on gala-nights, musicians were placed to underline the conversation, so to speak, by graceful melodies executed on harp and violin, cello and viola-d’amore. It had been a pretty conceit of Régis’s mother thus to entertain her guests, and the Marquis, who had adored her, and never passed the graceful nook without a thrust of reminiscence, paused for a moment on his way up-stairs—between the heavy draperies that separated it from the landing. It never entered his head that from where he stood he could see without being seen. Indeed, he was at the moment quite absorbed in debating with himself whether he had not been extremely stupid to allow Laurence the privilege she was now enjoying. Though by no means strait-laced, Régis de Plenhœl felt almost as if her presence here, under present circumstances, was a desecration of his mother’s memory—of his daughter’s purity; for he had not liked Laurence’s demeanor just now. And then he heard something that made him coolly step upon the balcony and look down. He remained there absolutely petrified and immovable, for immediately beneath was Laurence, her white arms clasped around the neck of a tall man whom, with a start of amazement, he recog-

MOONGLADE

nized as Captain Neville Moray, the British Military Attaché, whom he had occasionally met since that famous evening five years ago, and always with pleasure.

"At last—at last! After a whole long year!" he heard Laurence say; but he scarcely knew her voice again, it was so full of warmth and of passion. In a moment Régis recovered himself sufficiently to see in a flash the abominable situation in which his customary easy-going habits had placed not only himself, but his little daughter, and a fine moisture broke out upon his forehead.

"The wretched woman!" he said, almost aloud, so great was his perturbation, and just then the subdued hum of a second motor reached him. "I wonder who now!" he soliloquized, precipitately retreating behind one of the palms at the back of the balcony—ready for inaction, as it were, for, in spite of all his *savoir-faire*, he no longer knew to which saint he should address his prayers. "Has she perhaps given a double *rendez-vous* here?" he cogitated, and as if to give him right, absurd as the supposition seemed, he suddenly heard coming from below the humorous greetings of his old acquaintance, Preston Wynne. So great was his surprise that he once more advanced, this time with every precaution, and peered downward into his own state salon. Laurence, like a well-behaved hostess, was seated now on a *canapé* before Moray and Wynne, and two other gentlemen, unknown to Régis, who wore on their dress-coats the insignia of several Orders, were hovering about her. Evidently too shrewd to invite Moray alone, she was giving a little semi-official reception, expecting, doubtless, by this move to pull the wool over his, Régis's, eyes. Reassured by the safety of numbers, he hurried to his study, where he summoned his old confidential servant and envoy extraordinary.

"François," he said, as soon as the valet entered, "you will see that her Serene-Highness Princess Palitzin does not leave the house without my being advised of it.

MOONGLADE

Remain in the little octagonal room off the main hall, and come and warn me the moment she asks for her carriage."

François saluted in the military fashion—a habit he had never been able to lose—and was on the point of retreat when his master called him back.

"The Princess," he said, "is receiving some friends here to-night, as you know. Find out who has already arrived, and report to me."

"That man is worth his weight in gold," mused the much-perturbed "Antinoüs." "He knows everybody by sight, has capacious ears and a silent tongue. They don't make them like that any longer, more's the pity!" And snatching up an evening paper, which he did not even pretend to read, he awaited François's return with such patience as he could muster.

In a few minutes that greatest of the world's wonders, a perfect servant, re-entered and respectfully stood at his master's elbow, waiting to be questioned.

"Well!" said Régis.

"So far, Monsieur le Marquis," quietly stated the old soldier, who looked like a retired general in his irreproachable evening dress, "there are in the salon with her Serene-Highness Monsieur le Capitaine Moray of the British Embassy; Monsieur Wynne of America; his Excellency the Marquis di Sebastiani, Italian *Chargé-d'Affaires*; Sefim Bey of the Ottoman Embassy; Monsieur le Comte de Védrines, attached to the French Embassy at St. Petersburg—now on leave; Monsieur le Vicomte de Braisles, First Secretary of the French Embassy at Madrid—also on leave; and Lord Charles Arbuthnot of the British Foreign Office."

Régis had not moved a muscle during this magnificent nomenclature. "A concert of the great Powers," he muttered to himself.

"Monsieur says?" inquired François.

MOONGLADE

"Nothing of any importance. But, by the way, François, how did you discover the names of the noble assemblage down below?"

"Monsieur le Marquis knows how easily chauffeurs jabber. Ah! It is not like the old times when the *gens-de-maison* knew how to keep their places with dignity! Then it took science to find out anything; but now! Monsieur le Marquis has doubtless noticed that servants are no longer what they used to be."

In spite of himself Régis smiled. "You are unique, my good François!" he remarked. "If any further—arrivals should take place, keep me posted," and with a nod he dismissed the paragon.

During the next two hours, withdrawn in his sanctum, the exasperated Marquis received at regular intervals from François a series of discreet intimations that half a dozen more personages of high degree had honored his domicile by their appearance within its walls; all men, all young or youngish, all attached to embassies or occupying official positions, excepting one, who was a cavalry officer known all over France for his great wealth and his unlaudable eccentricities.

"I wonder," raged poor "Antinoüs," champing his bit, "why she didn't invite the Papal Nuncio while she was about it! It would certainly have added *cachet* to the assembly. What in the world is she up to? Trying to hoodwink *me*?" And throwing the paper-knife he had been busying his fingers with to the other end of the room, he walked slowly after it; not with the intention of replacing it on his desk, but just to see how far it had gone.

Just then the door opened half-way, and François once more insinuated his person into the aperture.

"*Son Altesse Sérénissime* is alone, and would thank Monsieur le Marquis for his hospitality," he announced in a tone lugubrious enough for a judge in the black cap

MOONGLADE

about to pronounce sentence. The heavy clouds on his master's brow had not escaped his keenness of observation, and whatever happened to be his master's mood, François loyally and unconsciously echoed it.

"D—n Her Serene-Highness!" Régis growled in his mustache, and walked quickly down-stairs.

How he had planned to meet Laurence he remembered not at all as he found her carelessly fingering the sheaf of roses basking in a rock-crystal vase on a little table at her side. There was an absent smile about her pretty mouth and, for the first time in his knowledge of her, a peculiarly dreamy look in her splendid eyes. She turned, however, at the slight noise of his steps on the thick rugs, and presented him with a very soft glance.

"I am going now," she said, enchantingly. "But I could not do so without telling you all the nice things I think of you, Cousin Régis. It was really kind to let me believe myself even for a few hours the mistress of so adorable a place as this. I take it that Marguerite is already tucked in her little white bedlet, so I will ask you to say good night to her for me—to-morrow morning."

She was speaking a little excitedly; "worrying her fan," Régis thought, with undue violence, and there was now a very becoming tinge of pink in her soft cheeks. At his daughter's name, however, "Antinoüs" stiffened like a pointer, and without any suavity whatsoever, said:

"May I beg you to grant me a few minutes?"

Laurence's hazel orbs through a curtain of silken lashes fixed themselves coquettishly upon him.

"But, certainly," she readily acquiesced; "it will be a pleasure—I owe you a reward, anyhow!" And she seated herself in a high-backed carven chair, upon which it was easy to adopt regal airs.

"*C'est trop fort!*" inwardly commented Régis, and, disregarding her inviting gesture toward a pile of cushions

MOONGLADE

near her, he leaned one hand upon the rose-table, and began to speak in a grave voice of which she had never supposed him capable.

"Madame," he said, slowly, "you have placed me in a difficult position, and as I believe in plain dealing and plain speaking, I am about to ask you, without further preparation, what you intend to do about it."

Laurence straightened herself brusquely. The color fled from her face, and with it the very essence of her brilliant beauty.

"I!" she exclaimed. "I have put you in a difficult position? Would it be too much to ask you, monsieur, how I have contrived to be so unfortunate?"

"Assuredly, madame; that is exactly what I am here to do. I was unlucky enough to witness—wholly by accident—two or three hours ago your meeting with Captain Moray."

Laurence, who had already guessed something of the sort, indulged in a low, insolent laugh.

"Such 'accidents' have a name, monsieur," she said, with considerable effrontery. "They enter, it seems to me, into the province of espionage—of—the Third Section, if you prefer."

Régis passed over the intended insult as though it were not worth picking up.

"By accident," he quietly repeated. "And much as I dislike calling a woman to account, especially beneath my own roof, I desire—as I have already given myself the honor of telling you—to know from your own lips what you intend to do about it!"

Laurence for a second asked herself whether or no she could brazen the thing out. How much had he seen or heard? Perhaps this was only a "feeler," a mere trick to get rid of her whom he did not like—she had long ago perceived that. A swift glance at him, however, showed her a Régis so different from the gay and *debonnaire*

MOONGLADE

Grand Seigneur she had known until then that she felt a little shiver of fear pass between her very bare shoulders.

"Do about what?" she questioned. "You presume a good deal, Monsieur de Plenhœl, to address me as you are doing." She was marking time, and he knew it.

"Rest assured, madame, that I am not here for my pleasure," he replied. "You seem to forget that I am your husband's kinsman and friend—not to enumerate other capacities which had better not be mentioned just now. At any rate, I am endeavoring to do my best for his sake, and that of one or two more persons—your son, for instance. But if you persist in the line—of defense—you seem to have taken up, I will bow you out, and take my own course in the matter."

"But really, monsieur, I have not the faintest idea of what you want of me—of what you accuse me! Is this a joke, or do you genuinely imagine that you have me at a disadvantage?"

"I believe in the testimony of my own eyes."

"Indeed! Well, and what did your own eyes testify to, that so greatly offends a—*mondain* like yourself?"

Régis felt that he could have joyously beaten her with a schoolroom birch, but chivalry has its drawbacks, and he had to be content with an utterly futile clenching of the fingers, which she observed with pleasure. If she could only make him lose his temper!

"I saw you," he said, now quite brutally frank, "with your arms about Captain Moray's neck, and as if that were not sufficient, I heard you acknowledge your love for him."

Laurence played her next card with praiseworthy determination.

"Well—and what of it?" she said. "You chose to spy upon me, but you have merely discovered a mare's nest. Since you want the truth, I'll give it to you on all-fours. Captain Moray and I have known each other

MOONGLADE

since childhood, and there has always been a deep affection between us. Hearing of my arrival in Paris, he hastened to call upon me at the Embassy. I was out, and later on I sent him a *petit-bleu* inviting him here to-night with several other friends . . . and—your assent. As to my greeting to him, it is perfectly natural and proper after so many years' separation; nothing more than it should have been. Are you satisfied?"

"No!" answered Régis, looking down at her with a grim smile, and suddenly she came face to face with her position. What could she offer the Marquis to win him over, to silence him? She was dealing with a man who—so to speak—held the best cards. Would he play them? She breathed hard, for she was passing in those short seconds through æons of torture. Her high position, her whole future, her as yet unblemished name, were utterly and completely at Régis's mercy.

"What more do you want, then?" she asked at last, in a lowered voice that was shaking with dread and anger. She broke off with a ghastly forced laugh, and attempted to meet his straight glance with sullen, defiant eyes, but her gaze slowly fell before his own.

"I do not want much," Régis said, bending a little toward her and emphasizing each word by a gentle tap of his fingers on the inlaid table-top. "I am not your judge, nor do I desire to persecute you. Of that rest assured."

He paused, and in the intense silence that followed, a shower of rose-petals dropping to the floor was almost painfully audible.

"If this is the case, what do you demand of me?" she murmured, her head drooping so that he could see the artificial waving of her hair rising from her white neck to the circlet of her starred diadem.

"First of all, that you should never see Marguerite again, excepting in public and when it absolutely cannot

MOONGLADE

be avoided," he said, with a sort of repressed intensity that made her wince. "Secondly, that during your stay away from your husband you should, as far as possible, avoid us. The rest is with you. You know very well that I will not betray what I have discovered—to my amazement and regret. To preach is just as far from my mind and character. But remember; if ever Basil learns that you have stepped down from the pedestal upon which he placed you, he will be unmerciful."

"But"—she struggled—"there is nothing—I have done nothing—to deserve his anger! Your 'Madonna' is in no danger from me. I am an honest woman. I swear it! I swear it! I have never seen Captain Moray since my marriage before to-night."

She was white as a sheet now, and Régis remained silent. Where was the use of quoting her own words to her—"at last—at last—after a whole long year!" Did she even remember them in her terror and confusion? He knew with the intuitive certainty of a squire of dames that she was not the sort to entertain a platonic affection—he had known that long before. She was defending herself as best she could, according to her limitations, and all the manhood in him revolted against prolonging the scene.

"You are upset," he said, with less severity of tone, though his irritation had not diminished. "Supposing we let the matter drop now? I will, if you permit me, take you home. I have told you what I expect of you. Let it stop at that."

Once again he became the polished man of the world, his mask admirably reattached, and as he spoke he bowed deferentially.

For a moment she did not appear to have heard him. Her attitude was one miserable alluring droop, and from its nest of laces and *frou-frous* one exquisitely shod foot peeped out among the fallen rose-petals on the floor. The pose was clever.

MOONGLADE

"Why do you dislike me—so—so—much?" she murmured, gazing fixedly downward at her little jeweled slipper, timidly busy amid the ruin of the roses.

Régis glanced at this amusing by-play and carefully denied himself the luxury of a smile.

"I said nothing of the sort," he politely countered. "But it is getting very late, *Princess*." He employed the title with deliberate bad taste. "May I have your carriage called?"

Laurence rose with a great rustle of her flowing silks, and stood dry-lipped before him. She made an evident effort to speak, but mortification and rage forbade this. Her eyes were flashing like yellow zircons, and he looked at her in some apprehension, though the firm set of his mouth did not relax. Then without warning she swayed forward, seized his hand in both her own, as if to support herself, and, falling against his shoulder, burst into a passion of sobs.

"Well, that's the *bouquet*!" thought the irrepressible Régis, supporting her with no good will—this gay butterfly was in a virtuous mood! Besides, she was emphatically not his style, as he had remarked five years ago; also—under stress of weather, as it were—her methods were becoming somewhat too crude for this *rafiné*, used to more delicate behavior on the part of the women he admired.

"You—you—won't be convinced!" she sobbed, clutching the lapel of his coat. "You are a—h—h—harsh man—Régis!" There was great tenderness in the way she pronounced his name.

With difficulty he managed to unclasp the slender fingers, and, holding her at a distance by a gentle pressure on the wrists, he looked full at her—this time with an imperceptible smile.

"You are a very pretty woman, *Princess*, but do not waste your best weapons upon so negligible a person as myself—I am fire-proof."

MOONGLADE

A bright spot of color sprang into each of her pale cheeks—which, by the way, showed no trace of tears. Her white teeth clicked together and she drew back violently.

"You insult me, Monsieur de Plenhöel," she cried. "First you accuse me of having a lover. and now you infer that I wish to win you, too!"

Once more Régis bowed. "Madame," he said, smiling more openly, "I am not a coxcomb, but I realize that all means are fair in war, so I exonerate you of any design save that of self-protection." Whereupon he slipped her hand under his arm, drew her to the door of the main hall, and called François. In a few moments more he had solicitously wrapped her in her long cloak, and was escorting her to her waiting brougham before she could find a word to say.

"A prolonged *tête-à-tête* would offer no inducements to either of us now," she said at last, in a wonderfully collected voice, "so do not come with me; but be assured that we shall meet again and that I shall know how to thank you for this evening's hospitality."

"*Mille grâces, madame! Une hospitalité tout à fait Écossaise!*" he murmured, handing her into her carriage, and as she drove off she could see him, still bowing, on the last of the granite steps. Behind him the state ante-chamber and staircase blazed with light, which, fortunately, prevented her from seeing the expression of his face.

"And now how explain to the *Chevalier*? How keep Basil in the dark when he writes asking for news?" Régis thought, while regaining his study. His brows were knit, and for the second time that night he sank into deep thought from the depths of an arm-chair, smoking cigarette after cigarette, without, however, attaining to any satisfactory conclusion. "*Elle n'est pas très forte,*" he said several times to himself during the course of this long cogitation. No, Laurence was not very strong in

MOONGLADE

the sense he meant. Her finesses were sewn with white thread, her attempts at duping her fellow-creatures not quite sufficiently finished in detail, yet she seemed to have hoodwinked, tricked, done . . . that splendid chap, her husband! Régis moved restlessly. Of course he knew how some husbands could be blinded in spite of the sun, the moon, and the stars of every magnitude staring them in the face, but Basil was not made of that stuff. Then for an instant the pendulum swung back, and he asked himself whether he could possibly have been unjust. His long-standing antipathy for Laurence! Had it led him astray? He angrily threw one leg over the arm of his chair and asked himself that question squarely and fairly. "No! A thousand times no!" he suddenly exclaimed aloud. "I saw it all. Her eyes, her lips, her poise, were not those of an innocent woman—and her little attempt upon my own modest virtue! Pah! It's all as clear as daylight, and time will show it to be only too true. Meanwhile I'm going to take my *Chevalier* to farthest Brittany at once. It will be safer."

He rose, stretched himself, laughed a little nervously, and moved slowly up-stairs. As he passed the flower-gallery he heard the rush of fierce wind and rain driving on the glass dome. Against the rosy glow of the half-lowered hanging-lamps he saw a flock of sodden leaves clinging to the panes like great, green moths, seeking entrance to escape from the sudden squall, and with something between a yawn and a sigh he went on to his own rooms.

CHAPTER XII

Honor and old ideals, I fear
Are with the snows of yester-year,
Or like old houses—straitly mewed
In some sequestered solitude.

A RUSSIAN forest is assuredly one of the most impressive of all sights, especially in winter when the world has put on its ermine mantle. Soundless in its depths as the deeps of the sea—hushed in its silence like the great Sahara—save when an overloaded branch succumbs to its weight of snow and breaks with the dry crack of a gun, it seems utterly untenanted by beast or bird. The latter always congregate on the fringes of the villages, where grain is always to be found, owing to the gracious custom which causes every inhabitant at harvest-time to hang a sheaf beneath the eaves; while the bears have withdrawn into the comfortable quarters they have prudently arranged for themselves at the first serious hint of real cold. Wolves there are, on the prowl in the sly, shambling fashion which is peculiarly their own, but after sundown only—at least until emboldened by starvation. Now and then a ptarmigan, as white as the bitter season itself, flits heavily above the underlying thicket, though his appearance is as rare almost as when a capercailzie (*kurópatkà*) starts up to break the stillness with a tumult of wings and a sifting of powdery snow.

In the “wealthy” forests belonging to great territorial nobles, broad paths—or narrow roads—are cut and num-

MOONGLADE

bered, like the *allées* of some colossal park, and there, sleighs as also saddle-horses, become the easy means of pleasure to the owners or their guests. For there are few sensations more exhilarating and buoyant than to gallop upon those clear, smooth avenues between the serried trunks of trees, upbearing like the pillars of some Gothic cathedral the roof of a silent world.

Such a forest was that skirting the estate of the Duchesse de Salvières, *née* Palitzin, and in the dark before a bitter November dawn—bitter even for that glacial region—this charming person herself, masked to the eyes in fur, was driving her *trōika* furiously in the direction of Tverna. To drive a *trōika*, whether on earth or on snow, is an accomplishment seldom acquired by women, but Tatiana-Vassiliévna de Salvières—who never lost an occasion of declaring that she was *not* a woman—knew the art as thoroughly as the foremost *yémshik* in Muscovy.

Her above-mentioned pretensions were, fortunately, not borne out by any stigma of masculinity, either physical or mental—unless one could class in the latter category a fixity of purpose, a calm courage, and an inexhaustible fund of dogged endurance; which qualities, either singly or in combination, are wholly foreign to the feminine nature. Extremely lovely still, with her graceful oval face lighted by deep dark-gray eyes, and framed in warm-chestnut hair threaded already with narrow ribbons of clear silver, her short, authoritative nose, her firm, well-arched mouth and obstinate little chin, cleft by a characteristic *fossette*, she was what the French graphically call *faite au tour* (made on a turner's lathe). She was not tall, but admirably proportioned: slim-waisted, full-hipped, and square-shouldered, and her hands, extraordinarily small, but yet in no way resembling the useless, tapering, monkey-like variety so dear to flashy novelists under the appellation of *mains de Duchesse*, were shaped on an especially artistic model, which showed both char-

MOONGLADE

acter and strength. Her feet followed suit, amusingly high-arched, eminently aristocratic, and yet capable of being stood upon with supple energy, under any and every circumstance, and from her whole being there emanated a vigor, a self-reliance, and a *savoir-faire* altogether uncommon in these slouchy, spineless, neurasthenic days.

Such was the sister-in-law given by a far-seeing Providence to Laurence Seton, Princess Basil Palitzin, and lucky it was for her that this was so, for, to put it mildly, that fair daughter of Albion was just then seriously dismayed by a certain hornet's nest that she had wilfully broken open.

After her unwilling and ungracious return from "abroad," as she distinguished between Russia and other more fortunate European countries, Laurence had consented, not without painfully apparent reluctance, to re-integrate the Castle of Tverna during the hunting and shooting season. Great parties of guests had then filled the place and made life endurable to her for the time being; but when these had departed and she had succeeded in making her husband promise to take her to Petersburg for the winter, a sudden call to the bedside of an aunt who was also his godmother—a relationship very seriously considered in Russia—had forced him to leave in haste just as the first heavy snow was beginning to fall. He had not done so without many qualms of anxiety; for not only did he by now fully realize the unpopularity of his wife on his estates, but also the fact that the peasants' restlessness was slowly increasing, owing to the scantiness of the last harvest. Every precaution had been taken by him, however, to protect Laurence from any sort of annoyance during an absence that might be prolonged if he found his aged relative in danger; but notwithstanding this he had left Tverna with a heavy heart and an anxious mind.

MOONGLADE

Alone, or practically so, in the grim old cradle of her husband's race—for her maternal instincts had remained utterly undeveloped, and her little son's absence was always preferred by her to his company—Laurence found time hanging wearily on her hands. From morning till night, dressed with the costliness and splendor she was so fond of, she paced about the long enfilades of salons and galleries between which all the doors remained wide open, Russian fashion, bemoaning her unlucky fate. Now and again she paused before one or another of the interminable lines of windows fronting upon the *steppe*—the rooms were kept so warm that there was no rime on the glass—and could have shrieked aloud at the awful immensity stretched out beneath her. To this peculiar mind the prospect held no beauty, no grandeur even, though it possessed both in a great and marked measure. The Castle itself, built as it were from the rock whereon it stands, is gray as its gray escarpments, abrupt and uncompromising—a fortress armed *cap-à-pie*, impregnable to assault from three sides. At its back rises the mountainous ridge punctuated by the "Tverna rock"—as it is designated—which quickly broadens into an upland, miles and miles wide, dense with forest that, after a fashion, shelters the vast sweep of the rearward walls.

Basil had already been gone two weeks, and little by little Laurence's exasperation had been growing to unbearable proportions, when one afternoon, as she, according to her custom, was trailing her fur-bordered velvets up and down the first floor, Garrassime presented himself before her—hands crossed upon breast, and head bowed, as is the rule of inferiors toward their masters there.

"What do you want?" Laurence threw at him over her shoulder, not deigning to pause for the fraction of a second in her caged-tigress walk.

"The *staròstá*, Your Highness, waits below, and would crave the boon of a short audience."

MOONGLADE

Laurence turned irritably and came toward Garrassime.

"Indeed! Then let him know that I have no time to waste upon such as he!" she said, contemptuously.

Garrassime recoiled as if he had been struck, and, instinctively retreating to the nearest wall, put as great a distance between himself and his mistress as space would allow.

"Well, why don't you go?" she demanded, stamping her narrow foot, "instead of looking at me like a distressed owl. D'you hear?"

"I will go—Highness—I will go—but the *staròstá* reports two cases of typhus in the village—at least he thinks it is typhus, and he prays a doctor may be sent for, and disinfectants, and—"

"Typhus!" Laurence cried, falling back in her turn. "And you dare to approach me after speaking to that infected man! Go away! Go away! This instant!"

But Garrassime did not move. For once, on the contrary, he straightened himself to his full and enormous height, as if no longer in presence of a loftier personality, and when he spoke it was in altered accents.

"There is no risk, no danger!" he said, as he would have done to reassure a fretful child. "He, the *staròstá*, has not been near the houses where there is sickness—but there will be worse ere long if one does not act promptly. Had there been risk of contagion I would not have gone near him, for Prince Piotr's sake—indeed, Your Highness, not for mine, but for Prince Piotr's."

"How do you know whether there is risk or not?" Laurence exclaimed, violently drawing her skirts around her. "Send for twenty doctors, if you like. What do I care! I am going. I'll leave here to-day. Give orders for instant departure. Prince Piotr and his household can come away, too. But go, go at once, and see to it!"

She was clutching distractedly at the back of a chair, and her fingers fidgeted restlessly upon it. Garrassime

MOONGLADE

was gazing at her in absolute consternation. What was he to do in so unexpected a dilemma—so unheard-of a situation! And this was his beloved master's wife—the Princess—the mother of the Boy-Heir of his—Garrassime's—adoration!

"Your Highness does not know," he said, without moving from his place, "that the doctor is far away. He has twenty thousand *souls* to look after, and will not move without peremptory orders from the *Zèmtsvo*, or from Your Highness, since his Excellency our Prince is not here."

"And if it gets worse?" Laurence asked, shivering like a leaf. "If there is more of that plague coming? If—"

"*Bòg dâl y Bòg vzial*," Garrassime gravely replied (God gave and God took!). "That is all we will say then, Highness. It is for you, Illustrious, however, to prevent its happening—if it can yet be done!"

"The land-steward and the intendant must look to it all!" Laurence cried, tripping over her words. "You are here to take care of me—of Prince Piotr. You must not have anything to do with this ghastly affair!"

Garrassime, hiding his indignation, advanced nearer to her unreprieved; she was too frightened now to notice it. "The people," he pronounced, with slow respect, "would long since have starved, or died of many sicknesses, had our lords not taken care of them. The taxes are heavy, Your Highness. We of the villages were happier a thousand times as serfs—before the Little White Father of other days—peace be to his soul—gave them their liberty." Here Garrassime bowed three times, crossing himself devoutly, and Laurence, held by something she could not have explained, stood still, watching him. "There is nothing left," the gray-haired servitor ventured on, "but to help them in every way, and that is what the Prince, Your Highness's Illustrious Consort, has always done, as his noble father did before him. By their holy

MOONGLADE

forethought cholera has already been almost frightened away, and the people no longer starve. But there are other evils, Highness—and we—that is, they thought—that in the absence of our beloved master, Your Highness might consider—the welfare of—his—people, Highness—that you might wish to do for them what he does.”

She gave a short toss of the head. There was an expression of extreme disgust in her whole attitude that did not escape him, and perhaps emboldened him to go yet further.

“Your Highness cannot leave them now,” he said, almost sternly. “Not while His Excellency is away, while they are so hard pressed already. His Excellency’s forefathers through many, many generations have aided and saved the forefathers of these in pain and trouble. Remember that, Highness.”

“Cannot leave!” cried Laurence. “Cannot leave! Is there somebody here or anywhere with enough effrontery to call *me* to order?”

Garrassime glanced at her flashing eyes, at her white, furious face, and suddenly he dropped to his knees before her, in a dumb attitude of passionate entreaty, his hands clasped and upstretched to her. At last he spoke: “You are our Lady, our hereditary Providence, our all-powerful Mistress!” he said, almost as pale as she. “Have mercy upon them—upon yourself also—Highness. Do not show the people that you do not care—that you really are a stranger to them. They are a strange sort here, Highness. You do not know—you do not know!”

Tears of anguish were in the eyes of the giant as he knelt there at her feet, almost on the sumptuous folds of her gown. His inheritance and training admitted of no other belief than that those living on the land were born to look up to their Princes and Princesses, and that these latter had been put into the world for few other purposes than to help the peasants—no longer serfs, and therefore

MOONGLADE

no longer valuable property—as long as they needed help. It was a simple and direct creed, encouraged by Basil, easily assimilated and followed, and in his heart Garrassime prayed passionately that she might not close her eyes and ears to his entreaties; that God would not allow her to harden her heart.

Trembling with fright, Laurence once more stepped back. Her hatred of Russia and everything Russian was so intense for the moment that it obliterated the feeling of satisfied vanity which at times had come to her when she saw her husband's vassals—hers also by marriage if she had so willed it—grovel at her feet. A half-crazed desire to fly for safety deadened all other sensations, and her voice was dry and hoarse as she again ordered Garrassime to leave her presence, to hurry—only hurry—preparations for her departure.

Slowly the devoted man rose to his feet, and for an instant their eyes met like two blades naked for combat; then the servant lowered his gaze and, forcing himself to humility, bowed profoundly.

“I must obey,” he said, sorrowfully. “But Your Highness assuredly does not comprehend the evil that will be done—the anger of His Excellency, nor what the people are capable of if the sickness spreads, and stricken by panic, they feel themselves forsaken. We of the Castle cannot restrain them. They will break. I, Garrassime, know them well—although I am not of them. They will become uncontrollable—unrestrainable. I implore Your Highness not to decide anything in haste. God knows what they might be exasperated into doing—perhaps prevent Your Highness from leaving the place, and”—he added, desperately—“if Your Highness goes, they will feel—and justly so—that there is great danger: that they are lost.”

“But this is intolerable—unthinkable! Am I a prisoner here in my own Castle—prisoner of that mob of diseased brutes?”

MOONGLADE

She glanced affrightedly around her at the ancient tapestries shadowing the thick walls with uncouth figures, at the grim effigies in knightly mail that with their tall lances so helplessly guarded the great room, and finally at the row of unshuttered windows slowly darkening to the night, and through which she saw a swift gleam of powdered snow, a mere haze of sifting atoms fine as dust, but which she knew might precede a *tourmente*.

"Ah, God!" she cried. "Is there no help for me? No one who can come and release me from this torture?"

Garrassime was staring—staring—staring at her in her now disheveled beauty, his lips slowly curling back from his sharp white teeth.

"The Duchess!" Laurence suddenly shrieked. "She is at Palitzinovna. Send for the Duchesse de Salvières. She will know how to deal with this. She may still come in time. Surely she will not refuse to come! You don't think she will refuse, Garrassime?"

"No, she will not refuse to come," Garrassime assured her in a deep, extra-guttural voice. "But will it be well, Excellency, if it be found out afterward that Your Highness cannot manage her own people; that only our own born Princess, one of our House, can do this easy deed?"

"Easy deed?" exclaimed Laurence. "Easy deed? Besides, what does it matter to me? I will have nothing to do with the people, I tell you! What do you think I care about what these savages think or don't think? The Duchess may do so, but the Duchess belongs here, not I! Let her come, and I will go. I have had enough—enough of this awful country and its awful ways. Send for her. Tell the women to pack up my things at once. Prepare Prince Piotr. We go, I tell you—we go—at once!"

"No!"

At the sudden cry both Laurence and Garrassime turned

MOONGLADE

with one impulse to face the gallant little figure in Russian-green velvet bounding in from the next salon.

"No!" again repeated the childish voice. "I have heard! I was looking for Garrassime. I will not go and leave the sick people alone. Papa is away, and now *I* am the Prince!"

The boy's dark eyes were glowing, and with his little flushed face thrust excitedly forward, his baby speech suddenly clear and masterful, in spite of his short five years of life, he looked every inch what he claimed to be—the master in his father's absence.

A silent laugh swept over Garrassime's severe features, but he said nothing.

"You wretched child!" shrieked Laurence, sweeping forward as she spoke. "Carry him to his room, Garrassime, this instant. Well, this *is* the climax!"

"Don't you touch me, Garrassime—and, mother, you keep off." Two small fists shot out in defense, and, quivering all over, Piotr stood his ground.

With a choking gasp Laurence paused. This was the last straw for nerves wire-drawn with boredom, and now frayed out by fear. "Do what you like with him, Garrassime, but send immediately for the Duchess," she cried, and, gathering her long train under her arm, she fled before the unspoken contempt of the servant, the hatred in her son's eyes—fled by the nearest door, running straight before her, and as fast as she could.

Only after traversing several corridors did she begin to notice the unfamiliarity of her surroundings, and realize that her headlong rush had carried her far beyond the state apartments into regions where she had never as yet penetrated—the oldest part of the Castle, disused now for many years—a gloomy labyrinth of intersecting passages, of dark rooms furnished in the austere fashion of many generations before; somber salons and ante-chambers and galleries where faded brocade draperies

MOONGLADE

shivered and rippled in ghostly cross-currents of icy wind. She was breathing short, her feet tripped again and again on wrinkled carpets and rugs, but she never stopped, for nervous panic such as she had never known was clutching her by the throat, and it was from sheer exhaustion rather than from any purposeful intent that she suddenly broke her flight and leaned panting against a wall.

Where was she? The early winter afternoon was drawing to a close, and every object around her was beginning to be shrouded by the snow-footed twilight stealing in from without. Great chests bound with bands of tarnished steel lined the vast oval chamber where she stood; ancient oaken benches, worm-eaten and scarred with age, were stiffly ranged along the four gaunt sides of a ponderous table; the windows were uncurtained, excepting by rigid lambrequins covering only the upper portion of them as they might have a catafalque.

Laurence shudderingly took in all this, and her teeth began to chatter, not from cold only—though it was intensely cold there, where the benefits of hot-water pipes, or even of stoves or open fires, were non-existent—but from fear and apprehension carried to their highest degree.

"The muniment-room," she whispered to herself. Basil had spoken of it once, but she had never come there, so incurious was she about the past of a race she cared nothing for, excepting in so far as it concerned her own present High-Mightiness and colossal wealth.

Twice she tried to steady her trembling limbs—she knew she must go back to her own apartments before she fainted—twice she failed, clutching convulsively at the top of the nearest chest for support, and it was only after five minutes of strained effort that she succeeded in dragging herself away, step by shaking step. What she had at first taken for a niche in the wall opened before her like a crafty eye, revealing a winding stair in the thickness of the masonry, dusty, gloom-filled, and spider-

MOONGLADE

webbed. Had she unconsciously climbed to an upper floor, she questioned herself, or was she still on a level with her own rooms? She did not know, nor had she any means of finding out, especially in her present state of semi-collapse, so she fearfully recrossed the muniment-room and glanced down a straight, narrow gallery which she could not recall having traversed. Night was creeping on so rapidly now that once more terror shook her, and sooner than try that way she summoned her remaining strength, and, going back once more, after a moment's hesitation whether to follow the gut-like spiral up or down, she commenced to descend the narrow steps. It must be in a tower, she hazily realized, since there it was a trifle lighter, owing to the thickly glazed *meurtrières*, which reappeared at each successive winding of the interminable flight. Would she ever reach the bottom? Mechanically she began to count them one by one, lost the sequence, and at length found herself stranded in a square hall that smelled of mould and ancient damp. A faint gray light showed beyond an arched doorway on the other side, and toward this she walked, dragging her mauve velvets in the sodden grime, for even the weight of her train had grown to be too much for her. Another minute or so and she was in a high-vaulted passage, opening far down an endless perspective of groinings like some queer souterrain upon a clearer place—a lamp-lit place, evidently—some sort of still-room or cellar, she thought, for presently she could see great casks and chests along its rough stonework. This she negotiated, steering for another opening exactly opposite, but before she quite reached that she heard voices from beyond a nail-studded door that stood ajar on her right—angry Russian voices raised in execration or denunciation—she knew not which, for she had never been able to learn Russian well enough to follow a rapid conversation, nor had she tried very strenuously to do so, but in her over-excited condition

MOONGLADE

the whistling syllables became, curiously enough, almost plain to her.

"She? Help us?" the raucous, *vodka*-soaked accents were saying. "This stranger from among strangers! Bah! You don't believe it, do you? Did she ever do any of us a kindness, or throw us a look, even? We are not as good as dogs to her. But wait, she'll find us to be wolves, too, on occasion. Have patience, little fathers; our turn will come soon now; and were it not for the Boy—for Basil-Vassiliévitch, too, who cares for us in his way—when she lets him—we'd show her what we can do! Let her not tempt us too far, however—or we'll make her dance in the moonlight!" There was a chorus of coarse laughter, and then a short silence.

Making herself exceeding small, Laurence flattened herself against the spring of the huge stone arch behind her. Who could that be who had just spoken words of sedition within Tverna Castle? Who were they who had threatened her—and what—what was that about "dancing in the moonlight?" Her servants, the *staròstá*, *mujiks*, perhaps? Who could it have been? she asked herself. She felt that in another second she would ask aloud, and then cry out for help; and yet she knew instinctively that no sound could pass her throat, her parched lips. Suppose the speakers were to come out and see her there—she, the abhorred one? Would they tear her to pieces? She scarcely doubted it, and as noiselessly as she could she slipped into a near-by recess, trying still further to conceal herself. Encountering wood instead of stone, her hand groped feverishly for some means of escape—and, yes, was luck going to be with her at last?—her shaking fingers found a polished knob which yielded at her touch. A slight creak that brought the goose-flesh all over her for fear it should be heard, and the panel of a door receded, showing a lighted staircase, clean and garnished for constant use, as every inch of it denoted.

MOONGLADE

With a wild heart-beat she slid the panel to as quietly as she could, and ran with reviving energy up and up and higher up, until after a little she cleared the last steps and found herself face to face with another door. This she had no difficulty in opening, pushed aside a thick curtain, and there was the state-hall with its two huge fireplaces, its fur rugs and broad divans, its panoplies of arms, and tall candelabras shedding their mellow radiance over multitudinous and exquisite luxuries. At the farther end rose grandly the double flight leading to the private apartments, and up this too she raced as if hotly pursued, although all was silence and peace and delicious warmth, from the heaped-up logs burning rosily on the twin hearths to the broad bowls of violets and narcissi, roses and gardenias, filling the air with their delicate fragrance.

The same impulse of unquenchable terror drove her to close and double-lock all the entrances of her own rooms before letting herself fall in a heap upon the white-bear rug of her boudoir, and there she lay motionless, save for a persistent tremor which ran up and down her slim body in spasmodic waves.

After a time—it might have been an hour, more or less—there was a soft tap at the door opening upon the main gallery; but she did not stir, and the knock was repeated louder, and then still more loudly.

"Who is there?" Laurence asked, raising herself on one elbow.

"Célèste, Madame la Princesse!" fluted the mincing voice of her French maid, one eye to the keyhole and both ears keenly on the alert. "It is past the hour for Madame la Princesse to dress for the dinner."

"Don't bother me!" Laurence called, tremulously. "*Allez vous en, Célèste. I'll ring when I want you.*"

The pointed heels of the *camériste* beat a gay little tattoo on the inlaid floor of the corridor as she retreated, and again there was silence. Laurence settled down

MOONGLADE

again in the fur, her head cushioned on the stuffed bear's head, her brain slowly awakening to the fact that she must at any cost make good her escape before her sister-in-law arrived, for assuredly the Duchess would force her to remain at her post until Basil came back. Time was not lacking. The distance was great between Tverna and Palitzinovna, and even with fast horses it would take hours to accomplish the trip, especially in view of the severity of the weather; but still, had she not been so cramped and sore from her recent and unaccustomed exertions, she would have begun instantly to make preparations, although as yet she had not the faintest idea how, unaided, she could get away. This was absolutely the end of Russia for her! Nothing that Tatiana or even Basil could do or say would alter that resolve. He could stay there if he wished, or follow her if he chose. She would leave Piotr in his aunt's care, and Basil was welcome to keep his son, should he prefer remaining in his own land. *She did not care.* No, the worst of it all was that she really did not care a jot for either of them, and presently her fast-awakening imagination began to call forth pictures of a life of unbounded pleasure and luxury for herself in Paris and the Riviera. Long days of *dolce far niente*, long nights of amusement, suffused with incessant adulation, compliment, praise and appreciation of her charms, her wealth, her beauty! The image of Neville Moray gradually detached itself from this enticing background, and with a little gasp of surprise she saw before her new possibilities of delightful companionship, such as her present existence did not easily afford. Paris, Monte Carlo, Nice, Cannes, Cap Martin, yachting trips to Algiers or Alexandria, a month or so at Trouville or Deauville, the races, the *petits chevaux*, a box at the opera, probably sojourns in Rome during the season, and certainly brilliant appearances in May-decked London, or on the Solent later on, when Royal and Imperial visit-

MOONGLADE

ors displayed their pennants there. All this made up a kaleidoscopic jumble which whirled in her brain until she almost forgot what she considered her pressing and imminent personal danger. Another tap at the door, however, roused her to reality, and, sitting bolt upright, she listened.

"Excellency!" Garrassime was whispering through the keyhole. "Excellency, I implore Your Highness to let me in!"

"Old beast!" muttered Laurence, furiously, and gave no answer.

The pleading voice rose from a mere discreet murmur to a louder, yet always subdued, entreaty, and at last, remembering that she had better find out if her message had been sent; Laurence rose to her feet, and, noiselessly crossing to the door, pulled it brutally open without the least warning. Garrassime, the imperturbable, had been, so to speak, shaken out of his usual calm by Laurence's variegated doings that day, and no wonder, so that when brusquely confronted by the white-faced, wild-eyed, *dé-coiffée* woman, who had hitherto only appeared to him perched upon her faultless elegance, he fell back with some abruptness.

"Ah, the poor lamb!" he thought in his Russian way; "if she only would be good and let us love and respect her!" Fortunately for him, she was no mind-reader, and the pity in his eyes escaped her somewhat muddled powers of observation, for when she spoke it was with a hint of civility she had never deigned to grant him.

"Did you manage to send a rider to my sister-in-law, Garrassime?" she asked, swaying a little as she held on by one hand to the door-jamb, for she was far from steady yet.

Garrassime eyed her apprehensively. She did look bad, poor lady—and this was a difficult position and a rough place, after all was said and done, for such as she.

MOONGLADE

"Yes, Highness," he said in a humble voice. "Platon went with the message nigh three hours since."

Laurence heaved such a sigh of relief that she actually tottered on her tired feet, and, greatly alarmed, Garrassime picked her up like a baby and, crossing the room in two strides, had laid her down on a lounge before she knew what was happening. Dazed still, but absolutely indignant, she tried to struggle up, but an enormous hand—light as a feather—held her tenderly back, while to her outraged feelings Garrassime's deep voice, coaxing as if he were talking to little Piotr, uttered the following astounding and unpardonable words in impulsive Russian, "My daughter, my little dove, be quiet and let your old servant take care of you now, my pretty lamb!"

"That's what comes of Basil's impossible leniency toward his people! Impertinence! Familiarity! Indecent meddlesomeness! Ah! This unbearable pretense of belonging to the family!" thought Laurence, crimson with fury; and she wrathfully twisted out of his gentle grasp and sat up, frowning and haughty, on the edge of the lounge.

"Go! And send me Célèste before I do you a mischief, you insolent dog!" she cried, pointing to the door with a rigidly extended finger and the mien of an opera-bouffe queen dismissing a slave.

Completely stupefied, Garrassime stared at her, scarcely understanding what she was saying. How could his solicitude have offended her? He raised his eyes in involuntary protest; then he backed out of "The Presence," pausing on the threshold merely long enough to make a very low and final obeisance, and was gone.

A few minutes later Célèste came tripping in, her pert face alight with curiosity; but when she caught sight of her lady she uttered a little shriek of distress thin and as piercing as a penny whistle.

"But *mon Dieu!* What has Madame la Princesse done

MOONGLADE

to herself!" she cried, her large dark eyes widened to their uttermost extent.

Laurence rose impatiently, marched to the door, which she double-locked, and returned to the fire-corner, suddenly quite cool and collected.

"I have had a terrible fright, Célèste," she said. "This is a dreadful place; not fit for me to live in!"

"Ah, Madame la Princesse may well say so!" the maid affirmed, hands and eyes uplifted in dramatic acquiescence. "Ah, but a place! A place of devils and devilries!" she continued, volubly; for though Laurence so angrily resented familiarity from her inferiors, to her maid and quasi-confidante of secrets perhaps weightier than those of the toilet, she was decidedly "uncorseted," both physically and morally. "We shall all perish if Monsieur le Prince keeps us incarcerated here much longer. And those peasants, so ferocious, so savage! Not that some of them are not good-looking enough; the grooms, too. Madame la Princesse has not perhaps noticed the grooms?"

Laurence laughed and shrugged her shoulders, but without any indignation whatsoever. This merry daughter of Provence amused her even at this critical moment. Moreover, during the last few minutes a sudden plan had formed in her head: a plan for the execution of which Célèste might be a most useful and powerful aid.

"Don't you think, Célèste," she began, a trifle hesitatingly—"don't you think that we might escape from here, you and I alone, without anybody being the wiser?"

Célèste drew in her breath sensationally, and then let it out again between her rather pointed white teeth, in sincere compliment to a harmonious steam-valve. It was her usual method of expressing surprise, admiration, fear, joy, and what not else? There may be worse ones.

"Decamp!—vanish!" she cried, joyfully. "What a magnificent idea! But"—and she paused, one dimpled hand to her lips—"how can we do it, Madame la Prin-

MOONGLADE

cesse? The château is guarded like a *caserne*, and it's all rock, with walls that thick"—here she illustrated the thickness of those walls by a flight of both arms inimitably comprehensive and spaceful.

"You were speaking of the grooms, whom *you* decidedly have noticed," interrupted Laurence. "Tell me frankly, have you got any special friend among them?"

Célèste immediately fell into an attitude of unconvincing coyness; her whole diminutive person emanated a righteousness not to be trifled with, but the tip of her *retroussé* nose moved quaintly, like that of a rabbit scenting clover-laden breezes—the devil was losing nothing—and Laurence, who knew her handmaiden by heart, waited silently.

"Madame la Princesse must be pleased to joke!" the girl began, with much underlying archness. "A special friend—an *amoureux*? Is that what Madame la Princesse means?"

"Yes, if you like, an admirer."

"No! no! Madame la Princesse—excepting of course that great lout of a Fidélka, who makes a fool of himself whenever he gets the chance, and chooses to look at one with his big goggle eyes. These Russians—Madame la Princesse knows well how they are when they see a petticoat above a tight-drawn stocking—more especially a silk stocking. . . ." And the bright eyes glanced modestly down at the trim ankle and charmingly slippered foot peeping from the hem of her well-fitting dark-cloth skirt.

"Fidélka! A reassuring name for you. Faithful! Can anything speak more highly for him? Well, Célèste, do you believe that you could persuade your goggle-eyed pet to smuggle a sleigh out of the stables at sunrise tomorrow, and to drive us to the next post-station? Nobody would dare to pursue me, I am sure of that!"

"But why does not Madame la Princesse order a

MOONGLADE

sleigh? Madame la Princesse is the lady of the house; her orders are to be obeyed."

"You don't understand, my poor Célèste," Laurence said, with dawning annoyance. "The peasants have got an idea about my being created to look after them—when they are sick." And with what she deemed a flash of genius she hastily added, "Think of it, there's typhus in the village now; typhus, Célèste!"

Strange to state, however, Célèste did not pretend to faint. She was an extraordinarily vain and feather-brained girl, but no coward, and she merely nodded her tiny lace cap.

"Typhus! Oh yes! Old Garrassime said something of that to me a while ago, but that's nothing. One must have sickness about sometimes, and that would not frighten Madame la Princesse, of course. As to the peasants, these boors, they really mean no harm; they grumble and curse and swear when they're drunk—and they're mostly drunk; they're like our 'Reds' at home, all brandy and silliness! If I were Madame la Princesse I'd go out with a fat dog-whip and slash them till they're satisfied, that's the only way with such *canaille*. But it's the silence here, and the snow, and the *ennui* I don't like. I love shops and noise and electric lamps on both sides of the street, and—"

"O-o-o-o-h! Never mind what you love. Can you or can you not induce that Fidélka of yours to take us away?" Laurence exclaimed, peevishly; and Célèste, who felt vexed at the interruption, drew back, pouting.

"How can I tell, Madame la Princesse? And then there's Monsieur le Prince to consider; he'll make a fine fuss when he comes back and doesn't find us."

"I don't suppose he will mind not finding *you*!" Laurence said, witheringly and quite tactlessly. "So you needn't bother about that part of it."

This was going from bad to worse. Célèste's super-

MOONGLADE

cilious eyebrows became ominous, and Laurence quailed. She needed Célèste badly.

"Oh, don't be foolish! I'm only joking!" she prudently remarked, retreating from an untenable position with as much grace as she could muster. "See, it's getting late already," and she pointed to a little traveling-clock on the jewel-table that was nervously hurrying over the minute marks. "Why don't you go and try at once, *ma petite?*"

Somewhat mollified, Célèste smoothed her eyebrows with a delicate touch. "Eight o'clock," she consented, "and Madame la Princesse has had nothing to eat since tea; also Madame la Princesse looks frightful in that bedraggled tea-gown."

"Never mind the gown. Tell me, Célèste, can you slip out to the stables? The men must just have had their supper. You'd find that Fidélka, perhaps!"

The girl did not move. She had a habit of instantly repaying any small roughness meted out to her by the lady she served without love. She rather fancied seeing her on a silver gridiron, and the clock was still racing to the accompaniment of a wee musical tick, very enervating to hear.

Laurence was beaten! She would not beg, she could not order after the recent laxity of her talk, and quickly she unfastened a circlet of large turquoises from her slender wrist. "Catch!" she cried, with assumed gaiety, tossing the trinket to the girl.

Dexterously Célèste caught it in mid-air, and looked at it thoughtfully.

"Madame la Princesse is going to undress?" she asked, demurely.

"Why—no! It's for you!" responded the inwardly boiling Laurence.

"A bribe!" Célèste's voice was flute-like. "Madame la Princesse is too good. I do not deserve it!"

'But you do, Célèste—I mean a small present—since

MOONGLADE

you're going to help me, you and your handsome admirer. No, don't put it away; keep it. I'm sure it will look well on your arm."

"So do I, Madame la Princesse," Célèste admitted, carelessly dropping the jewel in the transparent pocket of her absurd lace apronlet. "If Madame la Princesse insists, I must naturally accept it. And now I will try to sneak out with a shawl over my head like the peasant women here; but it's only to please Madame la Princesse, because that Fidélka may not be alone, and, of course, I can't compromise myself before the other men."

"Here, put on my hooded fur cloak!" Laurence exclaimed, rising as though to fetch it herself—she was apparently willing to drain the cup to its bitterest dregs.

"*Madame n'y pense pas!*" remonstrated Célèste. "I'll be back in a moment, and Madame la Princesse must lock the door behind me, for fear the second or third or fourth maid should happen round. *En voilà des arias!*" she concluded, with a funny twist of the shoulders as she left the room.

As soon as she was gone Laurence got up, went into her bedroom, and, taking a diminutive bunch of keys from her pocket, shifted the *arras*, disclosing a narrow steel panel, which after some incantation of an arithmetical nature she got open. Behind a second fire-proof door, *écrin* upon *écrin* stood revealed, and these she precipitately opened. From a side-shelf of metal she brought forth a broad, flat reindeer-leather bag, hanging from a practically unbreakable belt, and hurriedly thrust into its many snug compartments the greater part of the jewel-safe's contents. Emeralds, rubies, pearls, sapphires, but especially diamonds—strings and rivers and clusters of diamonds—sparkled through her busy fingers and disappeared. Then she plunged her hand farther into the recess, and, drawing out a thick packet of large bank-notes, stowed them away by themselves in a separate pocket.

MOONGLADE

One move more, and with a click a secret drawer flew open. From this Laurence snatched a square linen-lined envelope full of letters, pressed it almost mechanically to her lips, and, slipping it beneath the notes, pulled up her skirt, fastened the belt tightly around her slender waist, and, having put everything in order, returned to the boudoir.

She was just in time to hear Célèste's tap, and opened instantly.

"Well?" she asked.

"*Bien!* Madame la Princesse! *Très-bien!* Fidèlka was lounging in the saddle-room—and for a consideration he'll do it!"

"How much?" demanded Laurence, unconsciously touching the leather bag beneath her crumpled velvets. "What have you paid? How much?" she repeated.

Célèste, who stood behind Laurence, busily unclasping the hooks of her tea-gown, laughed a mischievous laugh.

"A great deal—a great—great deal!"

"But how much?" repeated Laurence, vainly trying to look over her shoulder at the little maid.

"Madame la Princesse needn't worry," the latter gurgled, "nor does Madame la Princesse owe me anything."

"Why?"

"Because I paid from my own private treasury."

The soft dress had just fallen to the ground in a crushed circle about Laurence's feet, and Célèste's face, as she bent down for it, was pink as a June rose.

"Kisses!" exclaimed Laurence. "Only kisses?"

"But that's a great deal. Though I would have given even more to serve Madame la Princesse." And gathering fur and velvet into her arms, Célèste rushed into the adjoining bath-room, where a moment later she was noisily turning on both taps.

CHAPTER XIII

For pulling Incompetence out of the mire
Your guerdon is Hatred, and nothing higher.

"WHAT time is it?" the Duchesse de Salvières asked as best she could through her face-coverings, of the man who sat beside her in the flying sleigh, so enveloped in furs that he looked like a bear.

Fadéi, first coachman of Madame de Salvières, and, as she was wont to say, an old friend of her childhood—a statement that would certainly have horrified Laurence—cast a speculative glance toward the night-sky and the stars, sparkling icily above the lane of snow between the two walls of trees, and, bending sideways, he called out with perfect certainty, "Five o'clock, Highness!"

Tatiana snuggled her head again into her double hood, and for the first time touched the middle horse with her whip, which she immediately replaced in its socket, for she was driving with both hands outstretched as the *yémshiks* do, and straight ahead, avoiding the finesses to which fingerless fur-lined gloves do not lend themselves.

"Barine," a stallion of extraordinary beauty and corresponding fire, sprang forward, dragging his two running-mates with him, so that the pace became terrific. Bending over the rigid bar of the leather apron, Tatiana encouraged the horses by an occasional shrill whistle, which, coming through her mask, had a peculiarly alarming sound, and although twice Fadéi had ventured an imploring hand upon her sleeve, she refused to relinquish the ribbons to

MOONGLADE

him. It seemed to her somehow that were she—as she termed it—"not at the wheel," her impatience to arrive, great as it already was, would be doubled. A night drive through her forests in winter was no novelty to her, and besides she was extremely anxious, for with the natural exaggeration of messengers in general and himself in particular, Platon had made the most of his evil news, and, to hear him, Tatiana might have believed that her nephew and sister-in-law were on the point of being put to the torture in short order. Of course she did not credit all that had been reported to her; but still, knowing Laurence as she knew her now, and also the mood of the Tverna peasantry ever since Basil's unpopular marriage, she could not but feel far from reassured, and her hurry was well-nigh desperate.

Luckily the storm blowing at the beginning of the night had ceased as suddenly as it had started, and from the hour of her departure from home, a brilliant moon had slid steadily down the slope of the steel-blue Heavens, diffusing a grateful silver effulgence aslant the forest roads. Also there was a pallid aurora pulsating to the north, somewhere behind the tree-screen, mounting and descending in gold-shot primrose billows that were reflected from aloft, and shed an intermittent glamour upon the sleeping world.

"What folly is that woman not capable of!" reflected Tatiana. "Platon spoke of her wanting to run away with Garrassime and Piotr! That really would be the climax, and in such a case the people might be hard to deal with."

On and on flew the sleigh, swift as a swallow skimming over water, and pretty nearly as silent; for Tatiana was driving without bells, and the whispered "zzzzipp" of the smooth runners was scarcely audible at such a speed.

Hours seemed to pass like this, however. With unerring knowledge Tatiana threaded path after path, never

MOONGLADE

slackening to consult the large numerals painted on white boards that indicate the way. She knew it by heart. At last the trees began to thin. Long since she had passed from her own land into her brother's, and *verst* had succeeded *verst* without a break. If it was necessary to kill the horses, she would unhesitatingly do so, dearly as she loved them, for her one idea was Piotr, Basil's beloved boy, and she must be there before some rash move on Laurence's part could arouse the *mujiks* and bring about much trouble.

The red awakening of a new day had but just flamed up in the east when she glimpsed from afar the first *isba* of the village; here and there a patch of brilliant color caught her keen gaze, and she remembered that this was Sunday, when, winter or summer, the folk don their finest costumes to go to early church. And then of a sudden she saw a crowd of people surrounding something she could not quite distinguish. There were arms raised, thrashing the icy air, and as she drew nearer, the sound of angry voices mounting to a dull roar that penetrated even the heavy furs of her head-covering. Leaping to her feet, Tatiana lashed her horses savagely, while Fadéi, grasping her knees, steadied her in an agony of fear lest she should be dragged over the apron-bar and thrown headlong beneath the flying hoofs of the animals, who, quite unaccustomed to such severe treatment, were now running away for fair. Cries and imprecations greeted the reckless dash through the crowd, but little did Tatiana heed whom she upset, for she had caught sight of another sleigh pitching and tossing in the most amazing fashion right ahead of hers in the middle of the road, its horses struggling with a cluster of vociferating men hanging to their heads, its driver prone on his face in the snow, blood trickling from his forehead, and huddled amid fur robes and rugs two women clinging to each other.

"Burn the coward! Burn the coward! Drag her out!

MOONGLADE

She's a bad woman, an evil witch!" yelled the mob, milling round the sleigh. "She's running away from the Prince! She's deserting Prince Piotr! The villain! Enough of her! Into the oven with her!" clamored the women in their red petticoats and mitre-like coiffures brodered with gold and silver and little pearls.

Ghastly white, her *bashlik* fallen from head and face, Laurence, absolutely maddened with terror, clung to Célèste, expecting the end at every second. The little maid held her tight, rocking in unison with every plunge of the horses, every pitching of the sleigh, but still game.

Tatiana pulled up with a violent jerk—reinforced by Fadéi, who had seized the loops of the reins from behind—and, tearing the fur mask from her face, she jumped to the hard, frozen ground.

"Back!" she cried, in a voice that could be heard to the limits of the crowd. "Back! In the name of the Czar! Do you all want to go to Siberia?"

There was a sudden recoil—the people tumbling afrightedly over one another, horrified at what they had done. The nearest fell on their knees before her in the trampled snow, or groveled like animals upon their faces, some trying to get at her hands, others clutching at the hem of her skirt, to kiss it. "Our Princess! Our own Princess!" they cried. "Take the worthless one away! Give us our own Princess!" Delirium was rampant, emotions of every imaginable kind alive and writhing, but Tatiana was the very person to deal with such a crisis. In a trice she had freed herself from all those imploring hands, cuffing a few heads with a quick "Get out of the way, Fèdor-Ivànovitch! Here, you Andréi-Petrovitch, quit howling! Anna-Stéfanôvnà, you'll get something for yourself if you don't look out! Shame on you silly sheep! How did you dare? Where are you, *staròstá*? What do you mean by letting such an outrage be done?" etc., etc., etc., until she reached the half-overtaken sleigh and

MOONGLADE

Laurence, who at the first sign of help had fainted. - It took Tatiana little time or trouble to have her removed to her own sleigh, and to drive her, together with Célestè—very pale but quite calm—back to the Castle, followed by uproarious demands for forgiveness from the repentant and frightened multitude.

An hour after her descent upon this scene of disorder there was no longer any sign of confusion, either in the village or at the Castle, where she had found the servants huddled in every corner, trembling with fright, and Garrassime, almost beside himself with wrath and indignation, mounting guard over Master Piotr, who, it appeared, was determined to take the law into his own hands and go and thrash everybody without further delay. From Garrassime the Duchess learned that before any one was astir, Fidélka, Célestè's admirer, had brought round to a side entrance a sleigh and pair, in which the Princess and her maid had taken their places. It was just at sun-up, and a few moments later Garrassime had been awakened at his post across the door of his unruly young charge's room by a breathless groom running in to report the flight of the Princess. He (Garrassime) explained that, having opened a window, he had seen the people gathering in masses upon the street below the rock, and had even heard shrieks upon shrieks as soon as the run-aways had come into view; but that he could not leave Prince Piotr for a moment, for, having been aroused by the groom's story, the boy had behaved—begging her Excellency's pardon—like a young devil! Ah, he had blood, had the little Seigneur! Heaven be praised, he had blood! And just then, as if to demonstrate the truth of this greatly understated report, Piotr himself afforded his aunt evidence that left nothing to be desired, by creating an uproar of singular power.

At last, having summoned the *staròstá* and called him severely to account, declaring to him that she would send

MOONGLADE

for a *sotnia* of Kossàks should he prove incapable of keeping his people quiet—a terrible menace indeed—Tatiana swallowed a hasty breakfast, and then bent her calm and inexorable steps toward Laurence's room.

She found that young lady sitting in front of a roaring log-fire, wrapped in a gallant *négligé* of the most daintily flowered silk, her hair in unbound glory, and on her face an expression of almost fiendish ill-temper. As her sister-in-law entered she rose and bowed slightly, omitting, no doubt by an oversight, to thank her for the timely arrival to which she probably owed her life. Indeed, her attitude was that of an unjustly accused and badly treated prisoner standing before his judge, rather than that of a grateful relative receiving her rescuer.

"I am sorry you had such a bad time of it this morning," Tatiana said, pleasantly. "If you'll allow me to do so, I will sit down and talk the matter over with you a bit." And suiting the action to the words, she possessed herself of a *chauffeuse* at the other side of the hearth and looked steadily into Laurence's sulky eyes.

"There's nothing to discuss," the latter said, shortly, dismissing Célèste from the room with a nod. "I sent for you to protect me from infuriated beasts to whose ways you are better used than I. I am obliged to you for coming so promptly. That is, I think, all there is to be said."

Tatiana, gazing into the dancing flames, smiled. She had not expected to find her brother's wife in a chastened mood, and was not disappointed. As to gratitude, she well knew that this quality would be lacking from any and every thought of this surprisingly heartless girl.

"I am glad I was in time," she quietly remarked. "Our peasants, however, are not beasts, though they are apt to become a little too impulsive when egged on—and there is no doubt that they are being periodically egged on—by an ever-increasing horde of professional agitators;

MOONGLADE

also they require a firm and kind hand on the reins at any season. This being so, I am afraid you acted unwisely when you refused to interest yourself in their welfare."

"Why should I interest myself in their affairs at all?" Laurence asked, with surprising disdain. "I see no reason why I should."

"Perhaps you forget that it is your duty to do so," was the disconcerting reply. "When you married my brother you did so with your eyes open. He did not conceal from you that the condition of his peasants was very near his heart. I know that he went so far as to disclose to you the various generous plans he has formed for checking the general spirit of unrest fostered by the imported—I advisedly say imported, since most of it comes from Germany—revolutionary literature and revolutionary counsels, that will in time cause irreparable harm. So I fear that either you should have accepted the bitter with the sweet and helped him in his self-imposed task, or else refused to share a high position and high ideals you felt yourself unable to attain."

"I do not see that at all!" declared Laurence.

"You do not! That is obvious; but the hour has come when you should, however."

"Do you imagine," Laurence exclaimed, shifting the issue, "that it is agreeable, whenever one shows oneself outside one's own castle grounds, to hear the contemptuous '*Tfou!*'—whatever that means—spat at you, even by the children?"

"I cannot tell you how it feels, never having been subjected to any insult, great or small."

"Of course you are of this country. They—the *mujiks* I mean—belonged to you when they were serfs—so they like and respect you."

"Which speaks very well for us ex-serf owners, if you will allow me to say so?"

MOONGLADE

"Possibly. I don't try to deny it. But I have never been a slave-driver, and lack all knowledge of the ropes."

Tatiana gave vent to a curt laugh. "Slave-driving would not, I think, be quite out of your line, my dear; but let that pass. There's no need for us to quarrel. In any case, I do not quite understand what you are trying to get at!"

"Plainly spoken, I'm trying to get at this: I want to go away from here, once and for all, and I hope you will not interfere with my doing so."

"I shall most certainly do nothing to help you in that respect!" Tatiana replied, bending forward to rub her hands at the fire, for, what between driving and cuffing, her fingers were still rather stiff and sore.

"Why not?" questioned Laurence, tilting her nose impertinently.

"Because in this benighted land we still believe in the wife's being subject to her husband, or at least in her awaiting his advice before hazarding some such step as you propose. Basil is away, and in his absence and that of our other brothers, I am the Head of our family here; therefore I refuse to concur in such an action on your part, should you again attempt to bolt."

"Then am I to understand that you propose to become my jailer in your brother's stead?"

This time Tatiana laughed heartily. The idea of Basil in the character of his wife's jailer amused her. "Don't talk nonsense!" she said, still laughing. "You are overwrought, or you would see the absurdity of your contention. I did not come here of my own volition. You sent for me, and leaving my husband and my children at a second's notice, I literally flew to your rescue. But if you expect me to become your accomplice in a dire piece of folly, you have reckoned without your—guest; that's all there is about it!"

She gently beat her hands together to aid the circula-

MOONGLADE

tion, drew back on her seat, leaned luxuriously among its cushions, and waited for an answer.

"Do you pretend to prevent me from leaving Tverna?" Laurence demanded, insolently. She was reaching a dangerous point of exasperation, and as she glanced at her sister-in-law her eyes were at once furtive and full of revolt.

"Oh! Yes!" the latter replied, unconcernedly. "Yes, decidedly, until Basil returns. Then it will be his affair to deal with the situation."

"By what means do you intend to coerce me into remaining here, if I don't wish to?" Laurence inquired, her nose high in the air.

"By extremely reasonable ones. To begin with, I propose to show you how ill-advised it would be for you to defy Basil's authority."

"Meaning what?"

"Plainly, my dear, that he would not for an instant countenance your taking the law by storm in so unseemly a fashion. You have been frightened, I understand, by some report of sickness in the village, whereupon, against the direct counsels of a man who was, so to speak, here to guard you and poor little Piotr, you attempted to decamp. The people with unpraiseworthy hastiness gave you a taste of their mettle. I profoundly regret it. But now you have nothing to fear. I am here and will stay with you as long as there is the faintest risk of further trouble. To-day, moreover, I shall communicate with Basil and recall him. If he cannot come at once I will prolong my sojourn, greatly against my own wishes, and in the mean time I ask you, as a sensible woman, to make the best of it, and not to bother me too much. That, I believe, is all I have to say!"

"Supposing I don't obey your orders?" Laurence cried, defiantly.

"Don't let us suppose anything of the sort!" countered

MOONGLADE

Tatiana. "Besides, I beg you to observe that so far my orders have been mere advice. But wait a minute." She rose, touched the bell, and sat down again, utterly disregarding Laurence's ferocious gaze.

"Célèste," the Duchess said, quietly, as that gay person answered the summons, "I want to say two words to you."

"I am at Madame la Duchesse's orders," the dauntless Provençale murmured, dropping a very finished little courtesy.

"Madame la Princesse, as you know, has been greatly upset by reports from below there," and she nodded in the direction of the village, "about some contagious illness or other. She needs quiet and the best of care. This morning's incident was—er—regrettable, but happily no harm was done, excepting to Fidèlka's silly pate—an accident he richly deserved. Moreover, he'll get over that in a day or two. Let me, however, warn you, Célèste, that, devoted as you are to your mistress, you must see how wrong it would be of you to get her into any more scrapes. You conducted yourself very well a while ago. You are brave. I like that."

"It is Madame la Duchesse who is brave!" burst forth Célèste, who had been quite carried away by Tatiana's masterly *entrée-en-scène*. "Brave as a lion! It was magnificent to witness Madame la Duchesse's boxing of their ears!"

Tatiana laughed her spontaneous laugh, willingly overlooking the girl's lack of deportment. She could see that she too was over-excited, which really was not surprising.

"I'm glad you liked it!" she said, simply. "*They* probably didn't! And for the present please abandon your warlike propensities. Everybody is going to behave here now, and in a few days the Prince will be back. Meanwhile take the greatest possible care of your mistress.

MOONGLADE

You can go!" she added, and the gesture with which she dismissed her made Célèste mutter as she went:

"Bravo! there's one who has no cold in her eyes! *Sapristi!* She's the genuine article, this Duchess, with her boyish ways and her big, laughing eyes. One might love this one *pour-tout-de-bon!*"

"You are making yourself at home!" sneered Laurence as soon as the door had closed again.

"That's precisely what I came for!" replied Tatiana. "And so should you—if I may continue to advise—seeing that this is your own hearth and fireside, after being mine for fifteen years—the age at which I had the luck to marry my dear *Jean-sans-peur.*"

"It's a long time ago?"

Tatiana got to her feet without any haste. "So it is," she admitted. "Our first-born is twenty already, which makes me exactly thirty-seven. A ripening time; but what matters? We Palitzins are said to improve with years, like good wine; which is a mercy, my temper not being always of the sweetest! I trust I have controlled it satisfactorily during this charming hour, my dear, but if perchance I did hurt your feelings I am heartily sorry for it. Lie down now and go to sleep for a few hours; it will refresh you immensely; and trust me to attend to everything needful." With which valediction she left the room, before Laurence had a chance to recommence hostilities.

CHAPTER XIV

Your secret thought, or foul or fair,
Thrills in the currents of the air,
And oft may breathe in careless play
From lips unwitting what they say.

BASIL, watching by his godmother's bedside when not employed in replacing her as owner and personal manager of one of the greatest estates in northern Russia, felt a constant presentiment of evil things to come. He could not have explained this sensation had he been asked to do so, but nevertheless it was quite strong enough to oppress him almost continually by day and night.

Vera-Nikoláievna, Countess Lanièvitch, had in her day been a celebrated beauty, but this circumstance had never succeeded in spoiling the remarkably clever and high-minded woman she was. Her husband had fallen at the head of his regiment during the Russo-Japanese war, in the course of which her four sons, two in the cavalry and two in the navy, had also heroically yielded up their lives. Left alone and desolate, the Great Lady had turned all that remained of tenderness in her nature to Basil-Vassilièvitch Palitzin, who she claimed was all that was left in the world for her to care about, and had made little Piotr her heir, with that fitness of things which invariably brings more water to an already overflowing river. She had met Laurence but twice—once at her own place, where Basil had brought his bride to be presented, the second time at Petersburg, and the experienced woman of the

MOONGLADE

world had immediately formed the worst possible opinion of her beloved godson's marriage. Nor had Laurence done anything to conciliate her husband's aged relative. Stubborn, with that peculiarly impenetrable stubbornness that one can but call pig-headed, having once made up her mind that she would hate—and continue to hate—every single thing or person connected with Russia and her new life, she had ignored the kindly advances of Countess Laniévitch, remaining from the first strictly polite and no more, which had both surprised and hurt the Dowager. Her health, always delicate since her great sorrows, had now finally given way, and Basil, filled with the greatest apprehensions, at last summoned the Court physician all the way from Petersburg to look deeper into the case. The great man came, and pronounced a far from reassuring verdict. The patient might or might not linger for another year. That there was no immediate danger he was willing to assert, but this was all, for the Countess suffered from heart trouble, and, moreover, complete discouragement—a very grave symptom in a person of her energetic nature—seemed to have overtaken her.

After his departure Basil had a long talk with his godmother, who urged him to go back to his family, for she was the most unselfish of women; but Basil could not make up his mind to leave her until she had at least regained some semblance of strength. It was then that Tatiana's message concerning the late events at Tverna arrived. She had softened the facts, and put as little responsibility upon Laurence as was compatible with truth; but Basil, nevertheless, saw clearly that his immediate return was imperative, and, avoiding to alarm his kinswoman by a detailed account of the affair, spoke of trouble with the peasants, and after arranging everything for her comparative comfort and ease of mind left her with much regret.

He had to spend some hours in Petersburg on his way

MOONGLADE

home, and preferring his club to his unprepared palace on the Nèwsky, all swathed in silence, cold, and brown holland, he repaired thither on leaving the train.

It had been quite a time since he had been there, and he was received with genuine enthusiasm by his numerous friends, who talked at once of killing the fatted calf for his benefit. In consequence, he dined that night with half a dozen men who had been his comrades when he was in the *Gardes-à-Cheval*, and in spite of his peculiarly unjoyful mood he became, as the feast progressed, much more cheerful than he had been for weeks.

"Where can one be better than in the bosom of one's patriotic family?" laughed Count Mourièff, throwing himself back in his chair as the coffee was brought, and blowing volumes of cigar-smoke toward the heavily gilded ceiling. The salon in which the dinner had taken place gave excellent testimony to the *entrain* of the occasion. In the corners of the big room huge Chinese urns were crowned with pyrotechnic bouquets of long-stemmed flowers; along the table windrows of rare fruits and gaily caparisoned bonbons demonstrated once more that in the very deeps of his nature the Russian is always more or less of a child, over-fond of sweets and pretty baubles—blossoms and luxuries of all sorts!

"You don't miss your patriotic family, Palitzin, you lucky beggar!" cried Captain Zàptine, one of Basil's most intimate friends. "You are too well provided otherwise! Gentlemen," he continued, turning to the others, "this long-legged animal here before you has discovered the secret of eternal youth and happiness. Let us envy him with all our hearts. Do you remember how he left us one fine evening at the camp of Krasnœ-Sèloe during the fateful season of nesting and of love—left us, the wretch, without a word of warning concerning his roseate and orange-budded plans?"

"Did he at least bear away a feather in his beak as a

MOONGLADE

token of peace and good will toward woman?" queried a remarkably tall and handsome man still very much on the right side of forty, who was known far and wide as a hardened misogynist, and wore the Cross of St. George upon his tunic—in commemoration, his compeers alleged, of his many victories over the dragon as represented by the fair sex.

"No; but he has come back, doubtless with an olive branch to make us forgive his desertion. Ah, my friends, my dear friends!" cried Zaptine; "he owed us this apology for neglecting our sisters and cousins in order to annex the most beautiful woman out of Russia! Let us therefore drink to his ever-increasing felicity, now that he *has* apologized."

"I have done nothing of the sort!" Basil tried to assert, but his voice was drowned by laughter, and with a serio-comic gesture he sat down again. And then there followed a general hurrah and loud calls for a "monster" punch to honor the toast, and presently the beverage made its appearance, flaming like all the fires of the lower regions in an immense silver "crater," embossed with the arms of the club, and flanked by little silver bowls marked in the same fashion. Without losing a moment Zaptine seized hold of the great ladle and began to make the punch dance—as he termed the operation.

"Ah!" the Chevalier-de-St. George declaimed. "Now we shall feel quite at home! No '*Wein, Weib, und Gesang*' for me! Punch, and good old comrades to swallow it at command, that's the only real thing!"

"Pfuhh . . . h!" retorted Zaptine, assiduously stirring the Vesuvius before him. "Don't listen to him, brothers; he is going to talk nonsense!"

"Nonsense! I? You don't know me! Is it nonsense to deprive oneself of the anxieties, the troubles, the imprisonment, and other delights of home rule? I am a sensible man, and intend to remain my own master, for

MOONGLADE

ever and for ever—as in the old song, whatever it's entitled. Petticoats! Don't talk to me of them. It makes me sweat icicles to think of them!"

"How do you account, then," put in Mourièff, scornfully, "for the charming *Lesghise*, who through some miracle worked by your Honor, finally passed from the high rank of a Caucasian prisoner of state to that of one of Petersburg's most admired *demi-mondaines*? Eh? Answer that if you can?"

There was a roar of laughter, in which even Basil joined as frankly as did the culprit himself.

"Caucasus is Caucasus," he retorted, "and *ennui* with a capital letter is its overlord. One is not responsible for anything one does there, I assure you."

"An agreeable and eminently convenient theory," Basil put in. "But look here; don't tease him, Mourièff; he did his duty gallantly by the lady in freeing her from oppression and bondage, as also by affording her the chance of new fields to conquer."

"She has certainly made admirable use of her opportunities! You know that Grand-Duke. . . ."

"Shh-sh-sh!" resounded from every side. "Hush-a-by baby! No personalities, *please*, especially about the Imperial Family."

"Well," grunted Zàptine, "it's going to be lovely if we can't slander the Grand Dukes between ourselves, especially as in this case it would be quite ancient history. Last year, by the way, the illustrious *Lesghise* in question was on the friendliest of terms with a bonny Englishman who had more good looks than money—which shows that some women are cruelly misjudged."

"Yes! Of course! But I heard that their friendship was a mere blind, a screen, a *laisser-courre*, as one might say."

"A screen? For whose benefit?"

"Some benighted husband's, I dare say, who believed

MOONGLADE

in the pure and loyal satisfaction of matrimonial life. I was assured that the British son of Mars, who is in the habit of obtaining Russian passports at irregular intervals, was not here for the *beaux-yeux* of the *Lesghise* at all, but merely traveled with her to throw dust in somebody's eyes."

"*Vier Kinder, kein Arbeit, und kein Geld, der kommt gewiss von Lerchenfeldt!*" parodied Zàptine, singing at the top of his lungs. "And who's the fortunate mortal who hides behind one fair woman in order to meet a fairer one with more safety? We must naturally suppose that the second one is the fairer, else how would you account for his criminal coldness toward the screen?"

"I don't remember his name," mused Mourièff. "Something ending with a *y*, I think. (*Diable!* but that punch is hot! Pour a bottle of brandy in to cool it!) I saw him, though—the happy mortal, that is—several times. Pleasing chap with square shoulders and many inches, soft, lackadaisical brown eyes, a promising trifle of a mustache, and big, white teeth."

"The better to eat you, my child!" cried Zàptine. "Military, did you say?"

"Of course—could see it at a glance; been drilled, you know. Came here as a private individual, but was recognized by— Let me see, who told me? Oh, I remember—our Colonel, our beloved jewel of a Colonel, that Cavalier of Cavaliers whom we glory in obeying, said the interesting youth was Military Attaché somewhere, somehow, but mum was the word—he was so visibly here for other purposes than to slyly inspect our frontier defenses. I met him—not the Colonel—the Don Juan—one afternoon leaving the upper galleries of the *Gostinoi-Dvòr*—there's always plenty of solitude there, for that's merely where the reserve merchandise from below is kept. He didn't seem pleased to see me—pulled the collar of his coat up to his eyes, and slunk away with black guilt

MOONGLADE

showing in every line of his back. Talk of petticoats! Lord, it wasn't the *Lesghise's* he—"

Basil, who had been listening at first only with one ear and then with absorbed attention, threw his cigar away with sudden violence.

"You're becoming indecent!" he said, and managed to say it with deceiving indifference. "I think I will retire; really, your conversation is unfit for my chaste hearing!" And he rose.

"Hear! Hear! A just and righteous man in our midst! Sit down, Palitzin, and preach us a sermon. Let's vote him a speaking-trumpet of honor. Go on, Basil, give it to us, old boy! We deserve it! We're a bad lot, we are!"

But Basil was inexorable. He elaborately explained that he was forced to catch his train at an unearthly hour, and that trains carrying *him* always started on time; so *nolens-volens*, after giving him a regular ovation, they let him go, accompanying him to the very portals of the club and his waiting sleigh, around which they gathered, uttering loud cheers.

The night was exceedingly cold. A half-congealed vapor formed a little cloud around the nostrils of the three horses held in rein by his coachman; the sidewalks, quite recently swept and powdered with fine sand, as is done again and again each day in Petersburg's luxurious quarters, showed two lines of pale gold on either side of the broad, brilliantly lighted streets, and rime lavishly broidered with innumerable paillettes every roof and projection sparkling beneath the frigid moon. It was a scene to hearten up any lover of the North; but Basil, intrenched behind his high sable collar, was not enjoying it as he should have done. For there was something he did not like slowly taking shape in his mind.

It was past eleven o'clock, but notwithstanding this fact he gave his *yèmshik* the order to drive him to the

MOONGLADE

house of a friend who had been his father's comrade-in-arms, and had until recently held the post of Chief of Police. "He has got into the habit, while manipulating the Third Section, of never going to bed. I'll find him as wide awake as a barrellful of mice," thought Basil, and his previsions were fulfilled. "I must clear up a point or two, otherwise I will never rest easy again," the Prince was saying angrily to himself, as he ascended the stairs; but when he entered the library where the General sat wrapped in a cloud of smoke, like a Buddhist image, his face was impassive.

"So here you are, you rascal!" chuckled the gray-beard, getting up to shake Basil warmly by the hand. "We never quite lose our old habits, and I knew that you had arrived this morning, the moment you put your foot on the quay. But here, what do you want of me that you look me up in this way? It must be something important!"

"Pardon me, my dear old friend," smiled Basil, accepting the comfortable seat indicated to him by the General. "I do not always come to see you because I want something."

"Let's admit that you do not always come for interested reasons, but your nose is wriggling as if upon some scent or other, and so I conclude that this is one of your 'on' days."

"You are dangerously perspicacious!" Basil remarked. "Yes, I did venture to disturb you to-night for some such reason."

"I thought so," laughed the ex-official, who had been dreaded above all his predecessors in office. "And now what is it you wish to find out?"

Basil lighted a cigarette, paused to expel two or three thin threads of smoke, and then spoke:

"I would like to know who is the English officer in mufti who has visited Petersburg on several occasions

MOONGLADE

during—the last year or two, let us say—to meet a woman of the half-world—as a matter of fact, a *Lesghise*; first *lançée* by—”

“A dashing officer of the *Gardes-à-Cheval*?” interrupted the General.

“Precisely!”

General Lédoff glanced at his interlocutor from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, then fell to puffing once more at his enormous pipe with extraordinary industry.

“You,” he said, dryly, “have no longer the least business to occupy yourself with ladies of the merrier sort, my son, and unless you give me a pretty good reason for so doing I will certainly and most virtuously refuse to assist you in so unpardonable an enterprise. What do you want of that species of fallen Princess?”

“Nothing of her, I assure you!” Basil emphatically declared; “but—one of my friends is interested in the question, and it is for him I speak. Surely you have still means at your disposal, my excellent friend, of finding out what I ask.”

“Certainly! It would be fine if an ex-Chief of Police—who managed to escape the régime of bombs to which all of us are subject—had not retained enough intelligence to accomplish so slight a thing. But why do you bother about other people’s love intrigues? Now that you are *à l’abris des voitures*, as our amiable allies say. It’s a loss of time, and you’ll get no thanks for your pains.”

“I am not looking for thanks,” Basil dryly observed.

“All the better for you. But you don’t suppose I can give you the information you seek at five seconds’ notice, do you, boiling youth? My head is no longer pigeon-holed like a receptacle for *dossiers*.”

“I wish you could, for I am leaving for Tverna on the next train, and I do not expect to be in Petersburg again for some time.”

MOONGLADE

"As pressing as that? Had trouble with your peasants, I heard, some time ago. Nothing very terrible, eh?"

"No."

"You have preserved your martial curtness, I see. I'm glad it wasn't serious, since you are so constructed that you can't bring yourself to shoot a few of them down to cool their blood. Ah! You can flatter yourself that your father and you were and are merciful proprietors! But, mark my words, my boy, you will get yourself shaken out of the saddle if you continue to ride without a martingale. The efforts of our worthy agitators will be crowned with success sooner or later; never doubt it; and when you have to call in a *sotnia* or two of whole-hearted Kossàks in order to prevent murder and sudden death, those *mujiks* of yours will rue the day when you gave them their head so imprudently. Here I am, however, galloping my favorite hobby again, instead of thinking of your *Lesghise*. Let me see—an English officer, did you say?"

He raised himself from the downy depths of his great arm-chair, and hobbled—for he had a gouty foot—to a large safe in the corner, draped and concealed beneath a Persian silk fabric that had the bloom of a ripe plum upon its soft folds.

Refusing Basil's aid, he opened the ponderous steel door, turned on an electric bulb near by, and after a few moments' search returned to his seat, holding in his hand a thick-set volume bound in dark-green morocco, and gold-lettered at the back "Daily Journal."

"Here," he laughed, "behold the heart of hearts of a police tyrant, the *sacro-sanctum* of his labors—a *précis* of great and minute events that may or may not come to a head and endanger the peace of the Empire! Nobody, until now, has ever seen even the outside of this spicy little work."

Basil inclined his head to thank the General for his

MOONGLADE

flattering confidence, and sat immovable while his companion flipped over the pages covered from top to bottom with close, small-writ lines, interspersed here and there with annotations in red ink, as he could clearly discern from where he sat.

Half an hour passed in complete silence, Basil lighting one cigarette from the butt of another, the General poring tirelessly over his patient handiwork. On a console a large malachite clock—an Imperial gift of gratitude—between two superb vases of the same luscious-looking stone, suddenly rang out an admirable rendition of the bells of St. Isaac's, and Basil listened with curious attention and a sort of retrospective enjoyment, as if the harmony belonged to a happy life he liked to have recalled to him; but that had passed away for ever.

The final cadences of the Northern midnight, like the soul in music of snowy Russia, died away upon the air of the high-ceiled library: a room stamped, so to speak, with the General's powerful individuality expressed in bronze and carven wood and trophies of arms, gorgeous textiles from far regions, and antique tapestries; and the old man, with two fingers between the pages of his "Daily Journal," suddenly looked up.

"The last two years or so, did you say?" he asked, turning his piercing eyes full on Basil.

"I think that is what I heard!" hesitated Basil, who was no longer quite sure of what he had heard, shifting his cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other. "I am not certain, of course."

"Because," the other explained, "my notes record here a sojourn of some duration—wait—a sojourn in Petersburg—four years ago of—of two weeks. The young man had previously visited the Crimea—or at least he came straight here from there." The General once more began to thumb his little book. "At that time," he went on, speaking very slowly, "he had been only for a short while

MOONGLADE

British Military Attaché in Paris. His name is Moray—Captain Neville Moray, of the Grenadier Guards. His arrival was brought instantly to my notice, owing to his connection with the diplomatic service. His passport had been obtained for him under the plea of traveling for pleasure. Moreover, he cannot be very rich, for he put up here at a decidedly second-rate hotel, made no calls on anybody, not even his Ambassador—which seemed rather queer—and did not once use his official position to obtain a presentation at Court or to any of the Grand Dukes or the military authorities. His acquaintance with the fair *Lesghise* in question may have antedated his first trip here, because she had accompanied a mutual friend of ours—let his name remain unpronounced, for he is a great miscreant and a delightful man—to Paris a few months previously, and if our English Lovelace is at all *lancé* in the smart world, he probably met her then. As a matter of fact, it was taken for granted in our Secret Service that he had come here on purpose to follow her. She is, as you know, a strikingly beautiful woman.”

Basil had risen, and, standing with his face beyond the circle of light cast by the monumental lamp on the table, was studiously selecting yet another fresh cigarette.

“I never set eyes on her, General,” he replied, “and I am deeply obliged to you for taking all this trouble.” He waved his hand slowly before his face, as though to dissipate the gauzy volutes floating between himself and his old friend. “I don’t know how to thank you,” he added, sincerely.

“Don’t thank me, my boy. It has given me great pleasure to dip into my old trade again. One is like that. The very smell of the harness once worn is pleasing to the nostrils. How it all comes back to me! For instance, look at this: I had utterly forgotten the very existence of this Englishman, and now that a corner of the veil was lifted by you a while ago, I can see before me a great

MOONGLADE

many incidents that lay dormant in an odd corner of my old brain, and, in particular, a little tableau that had its charms at the time."

"What was that?" asked Basil, with a quick turn of the head.

"Oh, a trifle! but since it was connected with our Guardsman, I'll tell it to you in two words. It was about three years ago, if I am correct, on a bitter winter day—thus does the tale begin. Ha! Ha! I am quite a *raconteur* in my humble way, I beg you to observe! Well, we were at the time keeping our eyes upon a certain Servian 'Prince'—the nerve they display, those Servians, in affording themselves, while away from home, the luxury of titles which do not exist in their own land, is truly marvelous! But to proceed: we were, as I was saying, having this questionable personage—er—watched, in a discreet fashion—you understand—so when driving out for my airing, the fancy seized me to go to the Botanical Gardens. I had been informed that the 'Noble' Servian was in the habit of dropping in there—to admire the flowers, and meet—quite by accident, of course—a friend—or perchance two—also naturally quite by accident—do you see? So I told Yèfime—you remember my old Yèfime—to drive me there. From a good distance the whole mass of the gardens began to gleam against the sky like some gigantic jewel-case open to the sun-rays. We had had a hard frost, which had incased every branch and twig in crystal—I can see it before me now. I stopped the sleigh and passed up the board walk leading to the conservatories beneath those gently clinking branches, and, pursuing my idea, I entered the great glass vestibule, and from there went into the main house. The first whiff of moist, heavily perfumed air after that cruel cold outside—I can really still smell it—was a sort of voluptuous delight, and I followed a broad, pebbled path bordered on each side by hedges of twenty-five-foot

MOONGLADE

camellias in full bloom. You know the place, and what a joy to the eye it is. Precious palms and tree-ferns growing free to the very top of the cupola . . . orange and lemon-colored orchids! Ah! What orchids—above regular thickets of gardenias—a paradise! After a while I came to the aerial staircase winding among all those lustrous plants, and reached the top where it communicates with the astounding lacy bridge that spans the whole length of this particular conservatory, and there I paused to lean a moment on the balustrade. Just below me on the balcony of the first landing were two people standing close together, a man and a woman; he tall, slimly built, but rather square-shouldered and straight as an arrow. The collar of his long fur coat was raised—in that heat, mind you! She, I could see, was extremely *élégante*, and heavily veiled. Both my natural and my official curiosity were aroused I confess, and, making myself as small as the good God ever permits me to be, I bent cautiously and listened. They were whispering, and so absorbed in one another that they had not heard my feet on the metal steps, and only a few disconnected words reached me. It struck me as peculiar that they were speaking English, for I greatly doubted whether my Servian would use that tongue, and, even more, whether he had ever used the Botanical Gardens for an amorous *rendez-vous*. His talents had appeared to be entirely political. Perhaps I had done him an injustice; at all events, I had decided to leave him to his twitterings, when an interesting thing happened. The uniformed guardian who keeps watch over the collections approached from below, yawning to dislocate his jaws, and the lovers sprang apart in evident dismay.

“‘Good-bye!’ I heard the woman’s muffled voice say, and the echo came at once:

“‘Good-bye, my love—my heart and soul to you—always!’

“The sun was lighting up the whole place with extraor-

MOONGLADE

dinary brilliancy, and I distinctly saw a tear splash on his gloved hand that rested on the edge of the balcony, as she fairly ran for the opposite staircase. He—poor devil—remained for a few minutes where he was, his shoulders rising and falling queerly, and he nervously pulled down his fur collar as if he wanted air. The face I saw then, for a glancing second, was that of young Moray. And I wondered; because that *Lesghise* assuredly spoke no English, barely a few lately acquired phrases of French, perhaps—if that! Next day a grave political complication drove the whole thing out of my head, and I have never thought of it since.”

“The winter of four years ago!” Basil soliloquized, and, recollecting himself, he added with a laugh: “You have a good memory, General. Fancy recalling—even with a little extraneous aid—so trifling an incident after four long years!”

The General, who was not quite proof against compliment, got up and rubbed his hands.

“Eh! Eh!” he cried. “It does not always follow that gray hairs must needs dull the brain beneath them. I could still have been of considerable use, I believe, to our Imperial Master; but, as I happen to know, he was strongly advised to the contrary, and so here I am now, lazing my life away, inactive and growing fat, with my ear split like a reformed French cavalry horse. But must you really go? Of course, now that you have wrung me dry, you leave me without a scruple, for such are the ways of the world. But you were always a cajoler, my dear Basil, and knew how to gain your ends. I hope that some day in the near future you will honor me with more details concerning this affair of the English captain, for I cannot understand how you can be so interested in him as to waste an hour over it.”

“Waste, General? An hour spent with you is never wasted.”

MOONGLADE

"There you are again! Flattery, vile flattery! And you are going straight on from here to your beautiful Tverna? Pray place my homage at Madame Palitzin's pretty feet. How is she, by the way? Upon my word, I am losing my manners."

"She is very well as far as I know," Basil replied. "I am from my aunt Lanièvitch's place; she is gravely ill, and I stayed with her quite a while. But Tatiana is with my wife and boy, so I felt quite safe about them."

"Give Tatiana my love—my very dearest love. She is the *one* woman among women. Lord! How she would scold me if she heard! Does she still fly into a rage when one calls her a woman? You remember when she was a little thing, no higher than my boot, the way she would behave when I told her she couldn't enter the *Corps-des-Pages* because little girls were never accepted there, for fear they should shock the young gentlemen of that great institution?" And, laughing and talking, the delightful old man accompanied Basil all the way down-stairs, indeed, to the very limits of his cathedral-like hall, the walls of which were almost invisible for the collections of arms, brought back from many campaigns on the confines of the grim White Empire he had so loyally served.

Basil buried himself in the furs of his sleigh with a sigh of utter weariness, but after a brief moment he squared his shoulders with an effort, and sat up again. His horses were making their hoofs ring on the bridge of the Greater Neva, and the enchained river was something to take even his brooding gaze. The "catching of the ice" had that year come on early and with a rush, just when the last late autumn gales were driving across the water, so the frost had fallen upon great waves rolling from bank to bank, and solidified them hand over hand, as it were. The aspect of their frozen strife had in it something singularly fierce and forceful, which well expressed the terrifying majesty of Winter in the North.

MOONGLADE

Like a girdle of multi-colored gems, the electric globes of the quays showed mauve and pale-green and primrose along both sides of the sculptured turmoil of ice, picking out sharply the rigid wave-crests; and beyond, beneath a sky of pellucid sapphire powdered all over with twinkling stars among which winked and flashed the bigger constellations, the swarm of golden church domes—images of faith—looked as though countless fairy palaces were climbing one upon another toward realms of the pure ideal.

The splendidly illumined cross of St. Isaac's caught Basil's eye as the horses sped on, and he reverently repeated its sign upon his breast. "God have mercy!" he whispered, and sat very still, looking upward.

CHAPTER XV

Rest well assured that now I see
Nor shall hereafter blinded be.

"Ask Madame la Princesse if she can receive me for a moment."

Basil, emerging from his dressing-room where he had removed the stains of travel, spoke in his usual quiet voice, and Célèste courtesied to the ground without daring to raise her eyes, for she was terribly afraid of the Prince, and her share in the escapade of two weeks ago filled her with extreme alarm; so she passed on ahead of him toward Laurence's apartments with suitable haste, and for once without indulging in any coquettishly tripping steps.

For a very few moments only Basil waited in the entrance-hall, and then Célèste threw wide the door of the little salon preceding the bedroom and effaced herself murmuring in a subdued voice:

"Madame la Princesse awaits Monsieur le Prince."

Inside the air was almost stiflingly hot with that heat which one expects to find only in forcing-houses, and the violent perfume of heady flowers added to the illusion and positively took one by the throat. Laurence did not believe in the modest fragrance of violets and roses; to please her blossoms must be tropically sensational in scent and color, erratic of shape if possible, and especially very costly; wherefore the vases all over the suite bristled with a newly hybridized lily, red and yellow in gaudy

MOONGLADE

streaks like a South-American parrot, and pouring forth from their pointed petals torrents of pungent muskiness.

Half sitting, half reclining on the piled-up cushions of her favorite pink velvet lounge, enveloped like a *bon-bon-à-surprise* in folds upon folds of flesh-tinted gauze forming the most amiable of princely *sauts-de-lit*, she awaited her husband in apparent calm, although her heart was beating uncomfortably. She knew she was in for a scene of some kind or other, and had prepared for it by repeating to herself over and over again: "I must stand firm; I must stand firm at any cost! Men are afraid of scenes, even when they bring them about themselves." But she had not expected to find Basil quite so cool and indifferent upon his return to her after several weeks, nor so unimpressed by the skilful *mise-en-scène* she had prepared; and when he omitted even the formal hand-kiss of greeting and merely bowed before her, she felt a sudden sinking of her throbbing heart, as if it were going down into her rose-lined slippers—pretty little slippers, which, with the accompanying silken ankles, were, as usual, effectively in evidence.

"You are not very effusive?" she faltered, her head slightly on one side, her lovely eyes radiating electric currents. "After all those days!" It was a favorite formula of speech with her, evidently, for she was certainly not thinking just now of Neville or of the Hôtel de Plenhœl.

Basil, one elbow on the chimneypiece, gazed down at her, totally unmoved. Perchance he, too, had prepared himself carefully for this interview.

"You might never have seen me again," she continued, raising herself a little and pouting up at him like a mischievous child who wants caresses. "For it was a miracle that I was saved!"

Again she threw him a little appealing glance full of pathos, but his face was set and hard as flint, and sud-

MOONGLADE

denly Régis's words flashed through her mind: "*If ever Basil learns that you have stepped down from the pedestal upon which he placed you, he will be unmerciful.*"

"Why don't you speak?" she exclaimed, nervously sitting up and letting her feet drop to the carpet.

And then Basil laughed, a short, incisive laugh that cut like the lash of a whip. There are some laughs far more expressive than even the most forceful words, and this was one of that sort.

"Let me impress upon you the advisability of implicit truthfulness on your part, Laurence, before we go any further with this," he said, coldly.

"Are you going to be ugly to me!" she exclaimed, joining her hands together protestingly, "and just because I was afraid of your murderous peasants? Are you going to be horrid, Basil dear . . . to poor little me?"

Basil gulped down something in his throat—possibly the pungence of those flaring lilies—his arm fell limply to his side, and he stared at her in amazement. "You will make a mistake," he said, slowly, "if you try to go on hoodwinking me. It was well enough in the past, but that sort of thing is done with."

"What do you mean?" she asked, flushing crimson. "What do you mean? When have I tried to hoodwink you?"

"For more than five long persevering years. No, don't interrupt me; wait till I have pointed out a few things to you."

The soft laces about her neck seemed of a sudden to have been transformed into an implacable garotte, and she tore at them with shaking fingers. She was ashy pale now, even to her stiffening lips. He need not have forbidden her to speak, for she could not have done so had she tried.

"For over five long weary years," he quietly resumed, "you have made of me a mere purveyor of luxuries, of pleasures, of amusements. I fully admire your cleverness

MOONGLADE

in raising yourself to the position I gave you; but not, however, the self-sufficiency that caused you to neglect the obligations that position entails. You scarcely showed shrewdness in this respect, but I was ready after a few weeks of your company to take much for granted, to pardon much, and to adopt any *modus-vivendi* which would make it easier for you and me to keep up the farce of what I, at least, in my imbecility had thought to be a love marriage. I saw your failings; I discovered, one by one, faults I had never believed you capable of, but I thought you at least honest, and so I managed to endure the disappointment of finding in you nothing of what I had expected. I never doubted your honesty, mind you—never once. That saved all!”

He paused, bit his under lip, and went on in the same slow, deliberate way: “I discovered, to my extreme sorrow, that you did not love me as you claimed you did. It was a bitter pill for me to swallow; but even then I found excuses for you. The temptation of great wealth and—permit me to add in simple justice—of a state almost unequaled here or elsewhere. You were young, well-born, and poor. This is not a—taunt, far from it—but a straight and plain statement. Your beauty entitled you to the best that this earth can provide, and, meeting me on your road, you intentionally dazzled me, using, perhaps, not the most delicate of means to do so; but I was too blind then to discriminate—my fault entirely! I confess that I was to blame for not having been more keen-sighted, and even to-day I rest that blame upon myself.”

He turned his gaze away from the wild stare of her eyes, and at once she tottered to her feet. “Basil!” she cried. “Basil, I love you; you know I love you and have always loved you!” And, so queerly are women constructed, that at that moment when she was being shown in one flash how completely she had lost him, she felt with a keen pang how far above other men he towered,

MOONGLADE

how fine and strong he really was, and what a lover he might have remained but for her own wilful folly.

He did not move, he quietly continued bending his grave eyes upon her, scanning from head to foot this beautiful creature offering herself in a flash of awakening passion; her light draperies clinging to her like foam about Aphrodite, her glorious eyes wet with tears more genuine than had ever glistened there, her white arms yearningly stretched out to him.

"What a pity," he said, simply, "that you should not have thought of all this before!"

She half fell back as if he had struck her, then, impelled by a swift instinct to do all that she could to save herself, she suddenly flung herself at him, her head upon his breast, her loose-piled hair, shaken from its fastening ribbon by the violence of the action, tumbling like a mantle in lustrous ripples all around her.

"Basil! *My Basil!*" she moaned. "I am yours, only yours!" One part of her brain was working feverishly, for she must try to guess—and that quickly—what he knew, what had changed him so; the other part was inert and dazed. It was a crucial moment.

Firmly he detached her clinging hands from his shoulders, and, holding her by both slender wrists, he pressed her gently toward the lounge; but her hitherto dormant fighting powers were fully aroused now, and she struggled free, to fling herself in utter abasement at his feet, clasping his knees desperately. An expression of indescribable pain contracted his features, but she did not see that; all she knew was that he lifted her up ever so gently, as though she were a mere object to be removed from his path, and placed her in the same impersonal way where she had sat before.

Limitless astonishment mingled now with her terror and confusion. Was this the man whom she had led by the proverbial silken thread?

MOONGLADE

"Don't you realize," he was saying, "that you can no longer influence me; that I clearly see through the tricks and shams you have always practised upon me; that my eyes are wide open at last?"

Gripping the edge of the lounge with both hands, she stared at him in utter consternation, helpless, defeated, robbed at one stroke of all her weapons.

"Women," he pursued in that well-controlled, level tone that gave her such a sense of powerlessness, "hold different views of honor from what we do. I had never quite believed this, because our women are apart from the common herd, but you have convinced me. You are alarmed at the thought—not of losing me, but what I represent to you, and you are at the present minute perfectly willing to surrender unconditionally, even after what I have just told you, were I cowardly enough to accept such a surrender. You think that my anger will pass; but you may as well know that this is not going to be the case, because you have robbed me not only of the present, but of the past—because you have never been faithful to me, even when you first put your hand in mine and swore to be true, and because now I do not believe in you and never will!"

"But what makes you say these hideous things?" she gasped. "What have I done to deserve such cruelty—such contempt—such injustice?"

There was still something wanting in his accusation—she felt it instinctively; something she dreaded to hear him tell, and yet must know; something he, a gentleman, hated to say.

"The knowledge that you have always betrayed me," he said at last; "you who married me for gain, because your lover was too poor to be a welcome husband!"

"My lover!" she shrieked. "That is false! I have no lover!"

"Pardon me, madame," he said, "some time ago I

MOONGLADE

found it was necessary for my honor to learn what I could about your past—and—your present. A little late, no doubt, but what will you? We Russians are hard to rouse, but still harder to deceive twice over. Long before you knew me Neville Moray was your lover—he has continued to be so ever since. How far your—affection carried you before our marriage I do not know—but since then you have seen him at regular intervals, secretly, shamefully, and now”—his voice broke suddenly in a horrible way—“now I am forced to doubt the legitimacy of your son.”

From the long gallery beyond her apartments gay, childish shouts came ringing to their ears.

“Hop! Hop, Garrassime! Kick out your heels, horsey! Go faster! Go faster!” Piotr was calling out at the top of his voice, and in the small, heavily perfumed salon there was silence, tense and terrible, an oppressive lull in a storm. There was a burst of laughter, and the galloping of little feet pursuing Garrassime, the merry jingle of the silver bells, of the bridle with which the boy was driving his human steed, and then silence again.

Laurence had fallen forward against the cushions, her face hidden, both hands covering her ears. Basil drew a deep breath, and suddenly tears rose to his eyes. Slowly he walked to a window, and, his back toward her, gazed unseeingly at the immense *steppe* rolling out from the rocks far below. The magnificent isolation of the place was almost tragic in its completeness, and from that height the vast wrinklings of the unspotted snow-field seemed wrought from imperishable marble by the craft of some giant sculptor, enamoured of Eternity.

“Hear me, Basil!” murmured Laurence, hoarsely. “What you say is monstrous—false to the core. The boy is *yours—yours*, do you hear me?” There was the ring of truth in her words now, but the man who listened had ceased to believe once and for all. A bad woman may

MOONGLADE

inspire passion, but not the love that trusts and comprehends.

"How can I know?" came from the window, in a voice so altered that she did not recognize it, and abruptly started forward to see who had spoken. "How can I know," went on the lifeless, monotonous accusation, "since you were always untrue? Had you, tired of my tenderness, yielded to a sudden impulse and given yourself to another, you might yet have had some shadow of an excuse, perhaps. You would have merely sunk, in so doing, to the level of those women who break faith because it is their whim or their nature to do so. But what of the crime committed by a free agent in accepting another man's name, his love and trust, when it has become no longer possible to do so without black dishonor? You were talking a while ago of your poltroonery with regard to my peasants—my people here. What is that compared to the atrocious cowardice you were guilty of when you greedily accepted me as your husband—your best friend, your protector—knowing that you were no longer yours to dispose of, for a fortune or otherwise?"

"You are cruel—unfair, and you know it! There has been nothing, nothing, I tell you, that was serious between me and the—the—young man you named just now. He was a childhood's friend, nothing more."

Basil did not turn, he shrugged his shoulders wearily, that was all; and Laurence, cowed, daunted by this contemptuous silence, glanced apprehensively at those broad shoulders in a quick, haunted way.

"Oh," she cried, "won't you look round? Won't you read the truth in my eyes? Take care, Basil, of what you are doing! Don't push me too far!" The sentence that had begun in entreaty ended in a snarl of weak rage and menace that made Basil pivot on his heels and look at her with new surprise.

"I believe, God forgive me, that you are attempting

to threaten me!" he said, holding back his anger with a strong effort.

She was hanging her head, but not in shame; her hands were clasped between her knees, upon which the thin material of her dress drew tightly, and she glanced up at him through her eyelashes.

"If I do anything desperate," she said, between her teeth, "it will be your fault." And then in one of those moments of complete mental abandonment—a sudden weakening of over-taxed faculties to which women when cornered are liable—she committed the most fatal error of all. "Who," she asked, furiously—"who told you all this against me? Was it Régis de Plenhœl who talked?"

Basil's eyes were dark steel. "Régis de Plenhœl—Régis?" he echoed. "What has he to do with all this? Surely you did not make him your confidant?"

Too late she saw her terrible mistake. "No! No!" she cried, throwing out protesting arms. "I don't know what I am talking about. I did not say that!" But the harm was done.

"So," Basil said, "there are more than three of us to share this abominable secret! Well, that alters the case—for the future, that is!" He took a step toward her. "*À nous deux*, then, madame," he said, "for the present, at any rate. You are going to tell me exactly in what way that chivalrous fellow Régis has been mixed up by you in this shameful business, or else I'll know the reason why!"

The poor devil who but an instant ago was inwardly writhing in agony was gone. Nothing of him remained in evidence. It was now the judge, calm and inexorable, who stood before her, and that judge was her husband, and—a Prince—which will continue to make a difference throughout the ages, especially to natures like hers, in spite of all to the contrary that can be howled to the mul-

titude or printed in the malodorous pamphlets and "up-to-date" novels of a socialistic press.

And now for the second time it was imperative for her to decide what to say, instantly, in extenuation of her previous words. Her tortuous mind flickered under the effort, but she chose her line of defense, and spoke:

"That chivalrous fellow, Plenhœl, as you are pleased to call him, is not quite the pure white knight you think him. He—since you force me to say it—deigned from the first to look with favor upon me—pardon me for adopting the grandiloquent style you use yourself!" The sneer was unmistakable, and in her best manner.

Basil's features grew a little more rigid. "Go on!" he said.

"When I came to Plenhœl, and—met you—he showed me at once that he admired me. I might have married him instead of you had I wished it, and become the step-mother of your adored 'Gamin.'" She gave a wicked crack of laughter, for she saw the swift spasm that contracted his features as she pronounced the nickname of Marguerite; but this was gone in a flash, and Basil was listening calmly and collectedly again.

"Yes," she hastily resumed, "I could have been the Marquise de Plenhœl—not a thing to be despised when one comes to think of it! Nor is this quite all, for when I was in Paris I had to defend myself against quite a different sort of address from him. Oh! you will pretend not to believe that, either; but one night I was forced to run away from the Hôtel de Plenhœl, after a scene with him. He snatched me up in his arms; he—"

Basil straightened himself mechanically, which made him seem of a sudden absolutely gigantic.

"Do you," he said, "really expect me to accept this paltry explanation as the truth?" he asked.

She moved restlessly, but her flaming eyes did not flinch.

"You will continue to hold him innocent, I suppose," she said, bitterly. "Everybody, it seems, is innocent excepting me!"

"Not everybody!"

She drooped for a second beneath the taunt, but soon went on, as if only spurred to new effort.

"Yet he is well known, your chivalrous Régis, as quite the contrary of a woman-hater—very much the contrary! You said that to me yourself long ago. A Don Juan, you called him, laughing. Well, what is there so strange about his casting his handkerchief in my direction?" She paused, panting a little.

"You use most befitting expressions," Basil replied, "but you forget that Régis and I were boys together, and that I know him to be as incapable of making love—it is my turn to express regret for a somewhat drastic plainness of speech—to a young girl intrusted to his care, as of repeating the offense to my wife. I would refute the testimony of my own eyes where he is in question."

"They are, as a matter of fact, pretty gullible sometimes—your own eyes!" she said, insolently, utterly unable to resist the temptation of hitting back; but the dull flush on his face frightened her into silence.

"My eyes are, as you very justly remark," he acquiesced, "or, rather, they have been, pretty dull. I think, however, that you have effected a perfect cure, and that as an oculist you stand unrivaled. But do let us understand each other, once, and for all time to come."

"I ask no better," she retorted, deceived by his surface calm.

"Very well, then. Listen to me, and listen with all your might, because I shall not repeat what I tell you now. I want no scandal, no stain upon my name. *We* do not need such things to make it famous. So, although in Russia, which you so greatly dislike, divorce and annulment are obtainable under certain circumstances, I will

MOONGLADE

never resort to such humiliating means of separation; remember that. Life for us in common has been rendered impossible by you, and I shall provide for you elsewhere than under my own roof. You can have the house in Paris and a suitable income as long as you conduct yourself decently; also the villa at Beaulieu. Should you, however, attempt to amuse yourself by further intrigues, I will know how to stop you. Of your—of Captain Moray it is not worth while to speak, for I am going to challenge and kill him as soon as I have done with you. This being well understood, I will at once make all preparations for your departure from here, on the plea that you are not able to bear the severity of our climate, and you may go to Paris or Beaulieu (at your choice) immediately. Your maid and courier will accompany you; the staff of servants belonging to each of my establishments is there in permanence, as you know.”

“And do you imagine that you can dispose of me as if I were a parcel to be sent off by post at your pleasure?” She was white as paper, and her obstinate jaw worked curiously as she spoke. “And this,” she continued, rapidly, “because without proofs—tangible proofs—it pleases you to accuse me of things I have never dreamed of doing?”

For the first time Basil’s extraordinary self-restraint showed signs of giving way.

“You shall do as I say!” he broke in. “As to proofs, tangible or otherwise, they are superabundantly in my hand since a week. Do you wish me to tell you when and how and where your meetings with Captain Moray took place? Do you desire to know any particular details concerning those meetings, or your correspondence with him for the past years, before and after you deigned to marry me? In my turn I will warn you not to push me too far. We Palitzins are not a particularly patient race. I must be really a remarkable exception to have

MOONGLADE

stood what I have. For a mere stray glance of coquetry lives have been paid in the past, although, happily, until now our Princesses have been honest and scrupulously loyal women. Believe me, madame, you have nothing to gain by forcing a scandal which will acquaint the world with what you have done, for then you will be a *déclassée*, and of those there are too many already. All that remains for me now is to ask you when you can be ready to leave Tverna."

"Like a dismissed servant," she said, in a strangling voice. "And Piotr? Do you intend to keep him?"

He passed his left hand quickly across his eyes. "Piotr," he said, with an effort, the blood receding from his face and leaving it almost livid. "Piotr is officially at least a Prince Palitzin. He belongs to us, and shall remain under my care, although not with me. But this need not trouble you. He never was anything to you; the maternal fiber being, I fear, not one of your numerous strong points."

"And," she exclaimed, fiercely, "do you not care a jot about all this? You have loved me passionately. Are you forgetting our years together—our wedding-trip—everything?"

Basil looked at her for a moment, as if doubting the evidence of his own ears. Her effrontery really astounded him. "Had I not mistaken my feelings when I married you, this would have been much worse," he said, grimly. "As it is, the souvenirs you are so thoughtful as to invoke make little impression on me!"

With an execration on her lips Laurence sprang up and came close to her husband. "Ah!" she cried. "You mistook your feelings, did you? And it is *you* who dare to call me to account for *my* conduct? *You*, who have loved Marguerite de Plenhœl from time immemorial, one might say—and it is *you* who blame me for what you pretend I have done—*you*? No doubt she has not

MOONGLADE

waited until now to reciprocate your tender affection. I am—”

She did not finish, for with lightning-like rapidity his hand closed upon her arm. “We will leave her name out of this, if you please!” he said in a tone of command she had not yet heard from him. “You are not fit to pronounce it. Nor have you the right to draw infamous conclusions about her—or me, either—out of your richly furnished stores of malice. You know without a peradventure that you are slandering the purest of God’s creatures, and—a man who has given you every reason to respect him. Now, please, no more noise, in the interest of your own future. Try, if you can, to act with a little more dignity—before others at least.”

He released her with a gesture bordering on disgust, and she fell heavily into his arms in one of those short-lived fainting-fits that are the usual resort of overstrained feminine nerves. He lifted her to the lounge, gave a quick touch to her wrist—which would have completely reassured him had he been at all anxious—and, striding to the door, called Célèste.

“Your mistress is not well; look to her!” he said; and when Laurence opened her eyes she saw that he was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

There always is—you'll find it true,
A dance before a Waterloo.

"ONE little, two little, three little, four little, five little Russian boys!" chanted Piotr, counting on his fingers as he stood in the window recess of his aunt Tatiana's boudoir. Outside the sun was shining bravely on the tender spring verdure of Tsarskōe-Seloe, one of the most delicious *villegiaturas* in the immediate neighborhood of Petersburg. Behind him towered Garrassime, whose thick hair had during the last few months turned from dusky iron to silver, and in whose faithful eyes dwelt an unconquerable pain.

"I say, Garrassime," cried Piotr, interrupting his game, "there's going to be a review! The soldiers are coming to camp at Krétovsky—the tall ones you know—with the big sabers and the long cloaks. Won't that be jolly? Cousin Andrei-Andreitch is a captain there!"

"Of the *Gardes-à-Cheval*, my little dove. Yes!" replied Garrassime, gently stroking the chestnut locks straying across the boy's forehead; "yes, my lambkin, it will be jolly for you."

"And for you, too, Garrassime," the child declared. "I've noticed you don't like this place as well as Tverna, or is it because you miss papa? I miss papa. Oh, so much!—not mamma, she was always so nasty. Don't you think she was nasty, Garrassime?"

"Hush, hush, little Highness! You should not say

MOONGLADE

that!" Poor Garrassime in the bitterness of his heart could have wept aloud.

"And why not?" questioned the miniature tyrant he worshiped. "It is true. She is never like Aunt Tatiana, nor Aunt Nàstia—nor my little darling Malou, either. Where is my little darling Malou, Garrassime? Do send for her to come and play with me as we did at Plenhœl on the pebbles. Why can't you?"

His straight brows quivered as he raised those brilliant eyes of his to his patient attendant.

"Why can't he what?" Tatiana de Salvières asked, entering from the veranda door in her quick, resolute way.

"Send for my little darling Malou!" stoutly responded Piotr. "I am Prince Pierre Palitzin. Why should not people do my bidding?"

"You are Prince Dourák Palitzin," laughed the Duchess, "when you speak like that. Yes, Prince 'Donkey' Palitzin, and that adds no grace to the name. Do your bidding indeed, illustrious Sir! Wait until the littlest ones are not able to eat their soup off your head before you assume command of us all."

With immense dignity Piotr drew himself up. "I am very tall for my age," he gravely declared. "Cousin Pavlo was saying it only this morning."

"Cousin Pavlo is my son, Piotr, so I know that he often speaks great nonsense. Still, you are tallish for your age, and especially old enough to understand that you can't always have your own way."

"About little darling Malou, you mean, Aunt Tatiana?"

"About her, if you like, and about many other things, too. She, for instance, is not in Russia, so how could she play with you?"

"Make her come to Russia, then!" insisted Piotr; "or if you can't I'll ask Uncle Jean. He is much nicer than

MOONGLADE

you are, or Aunt Nàstia, even, Aunt Tatiana. Uncle Jean will bring little darling Malou."

His lower lip was beginning to tremble oddly, and the Duchess exchanged a look of apprehension with Garrassime.

"There, there, my pet," she consoled, quickly kneeling down beside her nephew, who with a sudden howl of distress flung himself violently into her arms.

For months and months and again months the same unceasing request for "little darling Malou" had been droned into the ears of Garrassime. While still at Tverna he alone had heard it, but lately the sympathetic uncle and aunt and young cousins had been assailed by that monotonous demand. Piotr never quite lost sight of it, and the slightest incident served to bring his desire to the surface, for during his sojourn in Brittany those two, Piotr and the "Gamin," had become fast friends indeed.

"Come," murmured Tatiana, lifting the heavy boy in her arms—"come, don't cry, Piotr dear. Get Garrassime to put on your coat and we will go and walk in the park. There's military music at the Kiosk to-day."

But Piotr refused to be comforted. Tears as big and round as glass beads kept rolling down his sun-kissed cheeks, and he clung about his aunt so desperately that at last she was forced to sit down and rock him to and fro like a baby.

"I want papa—I want little darling Malou," the boy sobbed. "Why has everybody gone away?" And with a sudden jerk of fury he tore himself loose, jumped to the floor, and, stamping both feet on the carpet, began to yell at the top of his lungs: "I want them now, at once! I'll kill somebody—if they don't come—I will—if they don't come this minute!"

Instantly Garrassime's arms were about the lad. "That's what I feared," his eyes said, plainly, and Tatiana, well aware of Piotr's ungovernable fits of rage, felt

MOONGLADE

herself getting pale as she saw him struggling in his gigantic attendant's restraining grasp.

"What," she was asking herself, dismally, "will become of this boy, now as good as orphaned, with such a temper?" And just then Salvières, drawn there by the noise, hurried in.

"What's all this?" he asked, glancing at his wife.

She raised her shoulders imperceptibly, nodding toward the child. Salvières moved to Garrassime's side and firmly took Piotr from him, and at his touch the boy suddenly ceased fighting.

"Tell me, Piotr," Salvières said, very calmly sitting him down on his knee, "why do you act like this?"

"I want papa!" gulped Piotr, swallowing his tears. "I want little darling Malou!"

"You do! Well, there's no harm in that; but what makes you ask for them in such an unmanly way?"

Piotr drew himself up, and, slipping from his uncle's knee, stood, still shaking and trembling, before him, his eyes opened to their widest extent.

"Unmanly!" he glumly repeated. "I am not unmanly, Uncle Jean."

"Ah, but yes you are, and you who wish to be a soldier, too! Don't you know that it is only women who cry and stamp their feet and go off the handle like this?"

"Thanks!" murmured Tatiana, who felt much relieved already.

"Women," pronounced Salvières, dictatorially; "all women, excepting your aunt Tatiana, of course!"

"And little darling Malou," came from the young unregenerate, one thumb in his mouth, and the shadow of a roguish smile dawning through his tears like watery sunshine at the close of a violent rain-storm.

"*Allons bon!*" grumbled Salvières. "You don't easily give up an idea, do you, Piotr? And now be a good boy; go with Garrassime to put on your things, and

MOONGLADE

you can come with me to the parade-ground at Krasnõe-Sèloe."

"Yes, Uncle Jean, I'll put on my things; but I'll go for a walk with Aunt Tatiana here in the park. She asked me first, you know, and I'm sorry I frightened her."

He wheeled on his flat little heels, honored his uncle with a perfectly executed military salute, and, going to his aunt, raised his rosy mouth to be kissed; then attended by Garrassime he ran swiftly up-stairs.

"My God!" said Tatiana, as soon as he was out of hearing, "what shall we do with him?"

Her husband rose, and, taking her hand, kissed it tenderly. "My dear Tatiana," he said, gravely, "we will, as usual, try to do our duty. It is not an easy one, I grant you, but still it must be accomplished somehow or other."

"Poor little fellow!" she said, rather hopelessly. "Oh, Jean, isn't it pitiful to think of Basil, who adored him, and now refuses to see him—with that terrible obstinacy and strength of purpose we Palitzins are cursed with? What will come of all this? Tell me that, if you can?"

Jean de Salvières had been asked this question before, but now, as then, he was quite unable to answer it.

"It is so heartbreaking," continued Tatiana, who evidently did not expect a reply. "That miserable woman who has spoiled all our lives and is now amusing herself at Beaulieu on her yacht—for she has a yacht of her own, if you please—and Basil practically a fugitive after that fatal duel. Tverna closed up and all those splendid plans for the peasants at a standstill. How *can* she exist with such a remorse? How can she laugh on, trifle with life, think of nothing but her own precious self, and never of her poor little son—of Basil?"

"*Que voulez-vous, ma chérie?*" he said, soothingly. "She's made that way. I for one never could endure her; but things will come out right in the end. I have

MOONGLADE

thought more than once lately that we might do worse than go to Salvières for the summer, and ask Régis and Marguerite to stay with us for a while."

Tatiana turned and gazed at him in undisguised admiration.

"You've got it!" she cried. "You've got it! You dear, clever, dazzling old boy!" And, throwing her arms about his neck, she gave him a resounding kiss.

"Delicious!" he exclaimed, smacking his lips. "Your kisses, Tatiana, are like yourself—quite out of the common nice."

"Not so loud!" she admonished. "Think of it, there's frost on both our heads, and we've been lovers for nearly—"

"'Ssh, 'ssh!" he laughed. "Never mention figures except when they are slender ones."

She was about to riposte, but Piotr at this juncture bounded in from the veranda, waving his Kossák cap in his chubby gloved hand, with a "But aren't you ready, Aunt Tatiana?" that sent her flying to her dressing-room.

In the park it was delightful. The trees were covered with a delicate veil of tender green, while flowers newly bedded and glistening with drops from the gardeners' "lances" breathed the very breath of spring, and the ruffled surface of the lakes gleamed and glinted like pailleted satin, showing soft azure lights through their dancing transparencies.

Salvières and his Tatiana had determined to go together to Krasnœ-Sèloe in order to cheer up their little nephew, and in a short while they reached the camp.

The dust raised in the early morning by cavalry hoofs and the marching feet of infantry had settled down after a fashion, but there still remained a sort of golden haze about the whole place which gave it a mysterious charm. The great mess-tent, its front flaps symmetrically looped back, stood in the midst of the officers' toy

MOONGLADE

isbas like a snowy mother-hen tending her brood; while in the middle distance the gay little summer theater, where youth and middle-age and valor congregate in the evening, to while away the boredom engendered by banishment all of a few *versts* from Petersburg, displayed its gay façade. Here and there a general or a colonel, already a trifle heavy on the wing, passed at a canter saluting right and left, and many a "selfish" *dròchki* rattled by—narrow as a dagger-blade, with some young subaltern holding the reins, and often with one of his comrades perched on the very edge of his knees—so to speak—for lack of space to sit beside him.

And here, there, and everywhere—like pastilles of peppermint and cherry, as Piotr sapiently remarked—the flat, white caps *liséréd* with red of *Messieurs les Gardes-à-Cheval* dotted the fresh verdure, for that distinguished corps had just arrived to take up its manœuvering quarters.

"Pavlo," or, rather, Paul, Prince de Salvières, oldest son and heir of the charming couple of that ilk, had out of adoration for his mother elected to enter the Russian army, and more particularly the *Gardes-à-Cheval*—a crack corps—nor had his father objected to this. "You are not needed in France, my boy," he had said to the lad, "at least not as long as what one of the Republic's amiable ministers called 'draughty names' (*des noms à courants d'air*) are systematically discouraged in both the army and navy. Should the day of the *Revanche* ever dawn, it will be another affair, but for us, unfortunately, there is nothing to do now in our own beloved land. It is," he had added, although little given to sentiment, especially when expressed aloud, "the only real sorrow of my life to see that from day to day our rôle, political, diplomatic, or military, is rendered more and more impossible. However, our hour may come sooner than we expect. Let us, at any rate, pray that it may be so."

A strong Legitimist by inheritance, tradition, and per-

MOONGLADE

sonal faith and feeling, the Duc de Salvières recognized that he owed his allegiance to Philippe d'Orléans after having given it unstintingly to his father, the Comte de Paris—the elect of Henry V.—and the inconceivable delay of a final return to monarchy grieved him profoundly. That the Duc d'Orléans should have been incarcerated in a fortress because he had enlisted as a private to serve France had amazed and revolted Salvières, and the fact that the young Duc de Montpensier, brother and heir of the virtual King, should on that account and on no other have been refused the same privilege, and in consequence had entered the service of Spain, had once and for all heartened him. Thus did Pavlo himself become *plus Royaliste que le Roy*, perhaps, and, moreover, brought up mostly in Russia, he felt the greatest pride in wearing the Czar's uniform.

To-day there was even the tiniest hint of a swagger in his extraordinarily martial attitude as he met his parents. His handsome young face, his bonny blue eyes and tightly curled short hair—that his mother was wont to call his “copper cap”—were a pleasure to behold, and Piotr, with one of his clown-like bounds, rushed into his arms, shouting, “Aunt Tatiana says you often talk great nonsense, Cousin Pavlo, but I don't believe it; you are too great a soldier for that.”

There was a general laugh—Pavlo, red as the *liséré* of his cap, joining in gaily enough, though with a rapid, circular glance to see if any of his loitering comrades had overheard this singular compliment.

“Piotr's frankness is sometimes embarrassing!” exclaimed Tatiana, leaning on her tall-handled, fluffy parasol. “Indeed, he is becoming so very grown-up that your father and I are thinking of giving him the benefit of travel for his further enlightenment.”

Pavlo, the softest-hearted of budding warriors, whose own home life was and had always been so ideal, was full

MOONGLADE

of the greatest pity for his small cousin. He patted Piotr's head *en camarade*, thinking in spite of himself of the catastrophe that had deprived the child of father and mother at one stroke.

"Travels are famous for people who are growing up as fast as my cousin here," he gravely acquiesced; "but where is the voyage to lead you, my dear father and mother?"

"To Salvières, where, if it is at all possible, I should like you to join us later, 'Polo.'" Tatiana explained. "Surely you can get leave of absence easily enough."

Pavlo straightened his slim form and attempted to twist a mustache—which as yet consisted of some easily counted silken threads too blond to be truly noticeable.

"My beloved darling dear," he exclaimed, "I cannot be spared. Remember the August reviews; they are of the greatest importance, especially this year, when mobilization is so continually on the *tapis*."

"And of course they cannot take place without you," smiled Salvières. "His Majesty would certainly find it difficult to fulfil his Imperial duties without your sword and counsel."

Pavlo flushed again. It was his shame and distress that amusement, pleasure, sorrow, or vexation should invariably have this humiliating result. Just now it was merely amusement, for he was accustomed to his father's teasing and liked it, but yet he could have boxed his own ears for feeling his cheeks get hot.

"Oh, but you mustn't come and beard me in my den with unseemly jokes, father!" he remonstrated. "Here I am quite a personage, I assure you. Especially," he added, gracefully, "because I am Mamma's son and yours. Oh yes, I am quite a personage!"

"God forbid that I should doubt it for a single instant, my boy," solemnly rejoined Salvières. "And, by the way, our stay in Normandy will probably stretch over

MOONGLADE

August and perhaps September, so I do not see what will prevent you from spending your autumn leave—after the manœuvres—with us.”

“That of course alters the case,” Pavlo said. “Speaking with all moderation, I believe that what you propose is feasible later on; . . . at present, however . . .”

“The present,” Tatiana interposed, dogmatically, “is a thing without breadth or thickness, *mon lieutenant*, so let us pass it over. Also let me tell you as a further inducement to come to Normandy as soon as you can, that you will meet there your old friend the ‘Gamin,’ for your father and I are going to ask the Plenhœls to stay with us for a while.”

At the name of the “Gamin” the blood, which had begun to recede, once more flew its brilliant color to the very roots of Pavlo’s bright hair.

“The ‘Gamin,’ really?” he said, as casually as he could. “She must be quite a big girl now.”

Tatiana and Salvières were about to speak in chorus; but Piotr, who for once in his tender life had been silently listening, gave them no chance to do so. “Malou! my little darling Malou!” he shrieked, jumping into the air, rubber-ball wise. “Are we going to see little darling Malou?” He had become three shades redder than Pavlo himself, and his eyes were sparkling with joy.

“Dear me!” commented Salvières. “If this Piotr was a few short years older you could look to your laurels, Pavlo; he certainly is a most ardent lover of beauty.” But the ardent one was gambading like an escaped colt, and Pavlo hid his confusion by endeavoring to catch him, and as he put it, “to make him behave.”

“Now do your worst!” he cried, capturing the delighted child and pinioning his arms behind him. “Here one must be awfully serious, you know, Piotr, or one gets put under arrest.”

“*Je m’en fiche pas mal!*” responded Piotr, who was not

MOONGLADE

often parliamentary. "And now show me your *isba*, Cousin Pavlo, and all the camp. Because it will be the only chance I'll have if we are setting off to-morrow to-see little darling Malou."

"To-morrow? You absurd person! But, come, I'll betray to you as much of the secrets of a military encampment as is compatible with my duty, since you are, according to Mamma, so admirably grown-up; then if she permits it I'll drive back home with you for dinner."

It was getting late when the Salvières carriage re-entered the magnificent park of Tsarskôe-Seloe, where the adolescent foliage of its venerable limes was undershot by the last slant of the setting sun.

The Imperial Park has, especially in the early gloaming, a somber grandeur that is very impressive, as though in the twilight its loveliness were on tiptoe to reveal to you something new and startling about the ancient past. Eight o'clock was booming when the horses left the Palace, emerging from its glorious *parterres* to their left, and trotted rapidly on beneath the vaulting boughs of the broad *allée* skirting the lake, which was now shining like molten metal of a vaguely roseate hue. Further on a gilt cupola—that of the baths—rising from a promontory biting tooth-like into the glancing water, burned into the fainting pink and lilac of the sky, and, further still, tier upon tier of slowly dusking greens seemed the boundary line of some untrodden forest. They finally emerged through the colossal bronze portal of Alexander I., whereon is inscribed in golden letters, Russian on one side and French on the other, the words: "*To my beloved companions in arms*"; and soon drew up before the Salvières villa.

One of Tatiana's chief talents was to give to all her houses the peculiar charm with which she was herself endowed. Nothing banal or commonplace was ever inclosed between any walls belonging to her, but this, be it

MOONGLADE

understood, without the slightest effort on her part to create originality. Every detail of exterior or interior decoration was obviously spontaneous, utterly natural, and this was what made her various homes so intensely attractive. Indeed, to-night, when her husband and her son entered the dining-room, they turned a simultaneous look of gratitude upon the woman who created so delicious an atmosphere for them. The square table strewn with dark violets and feathery little tufts of mimosa, the dazzling crystal and beautiful old silver, the lace-shaded silver hanging-lamp half sunk in a bowl of pale turquoise filled with more violets, and slender branches of green and white ivy that twined about the silver suspension-chains to the very ceiling, were as beautifully restful to the eye as the dove-hued window draperies and wall hangings, whereon a few very choice water-color pictures alternated with carven brackets supporting rare cloisonné vases in the same shade of blue as the lamp bowl—also crowned with delicate flowers. Through the open windows the peculiarly aromatic scent of northern poplars and larch mingled with the perfume of résèda and heliotrope rising from the gardens, and as they took their places and unfolded their napkins each of the three indulged in a little sigh of deep satisfaction. Hospitable though they were, this was how the Salvières really loved to be, “between themselves”; close together as a table just large enough for Tatiana’s scheme of decoration in fruit and flowers would permit; with comfortable chairs where one could actually lean back at dessert; satin damask upon which one might even familiarly venture an elbow, and noiseless servants in plain liveries. Coffee was, on those occasions, served there, and cigarettes—of which Tatiana made a rather immoderate usage, since, as she gayly boasted, it was her only vice—were smoked while chatting in a most agreeable post-prandial manner.

In her white dress of some crinkly material that was

idealized crêpe-de-Chine, her pearls wound carelessly about her throat, and a sapphire arrow planted through her heavy torsades, the "Field Marshal," as Jean often called his wife, looked amazingly young, almost as if she had been Pavlo's elder sister by but a few years, and Salvières suddenly laughed.

"Heavens!" he said, helping himself to sterlet with an unstinting hand, "what can be nicer than a nice little home like this? A fig for the Petersburg palace, where one dines on an island of carpet in the midst of a parquet the limits of which are lost in dim distances—or the terrifyingly spacious banqueting-hall of Palitzinovna, that I dearly love in spite of its colossal proportions. No!" he lyrically declaimed. "Give me a tiny room, a crust of bread, a goblet of *vin-ordinaire* with peace and amity as sauces, and the plenitude of my sybaritism knows no bounds! By the way, what have we got to-night?" he continued, glancing at the little alabaster menu before his plate. "Ah! *canapés Impératrice, consommé froid, sterlet au naturel*—but— Bah! These are already things of the past. . . . And to come. . . ? *Poularde du mans aux truffes blanches*— Excellent! *Salade de crêsson à l'orange*— Yum, yum! *Gelée d'ananas frais*—etc., etc.! That's just what I was saying, an unobtrusive meal—all green and white and subdued tints against all the rules of gastronomic *bienséance*—green and white just like the ivy enthroned above our heads. Bravo, Tatiana! You are a positive genius, and so's your *chef-de-cuisine*! Poetic I assure you—these *demi-teintes*, and so fittingly underscored by those harmonious names, *Chablis* and *Chamber-tin*; the very tinkle of epicurianism with a final exclamation-point of quite enormous vividness. *Kümmel*—one imperceptible glasslet, not before, but after the frugal repast—an innovation of mine own!"

"My good Jean," Tatiana protested in French, "assuredly your exuberance can only mask some terrible

MOONGLADE

revelation or other that you keep for your after-*Kümmel* moment. I am always expecting a slate on the head when you are so gay before the roast."

"Which only shows how cruelly misunderstood I am by the wife of my bosom," he mocked. "Pavlo, I take you to witness that your angel-mother is casting aspersions upon the immaculate purity of my mood that is to be."

Pavlo grinned. "Well, sir," he said, "personally I suspect that dark clouds are gathering somewhere with or without your knowledge. Myself, I feel in the air an elusive but none the less convincing sense of coming thunder. Will it burst north, south, east, or west? Of course, not being much of a seer, I cannot tell, but it is there somewhere; pregnant with eventualities—perhaps only of 'summer lightning,' but I rather doubt that."

"Hush!" exclaimed Tatiana. "Don't joke about more eventualities. We have had quite enough of them lately; besides, you both know that I am desperately superstitious."

"A weakness which is the only flaw in your armor," observed Salvières.

"Nonsense!" she expostulated. "You are superstitious, too, and so is 'Polo.' Now you know you are, 'Polo' dear, and there was a white moth as long as that"—she extended her rounded arm to its full extent—"bothering about my dressing-room half an hour ago. It nearly committed suicide by falling into the bath I'd just quitted, and after flitting and winging and flopping round the lights, flew away by the crack of the door into Piotr's room. He was asleep already, and I had to adopt the hunting methods of the last of the Mohicans to retrieve the ghostly beast, and bear him, struggling like a demon, to the balcony, out in the gloaming. Stupid little soul! He wouldn't depart, although I blew on him and swung my *peignoir* sleeves in his face. There he hovered defiantly, as if saying, 'I'll

get at the boy whether you like it or not.' Brrrrrrrr—rrrrr—! It made me feel cold all down my back."

"My dear mother," Pavlo exclaimed, raising his nose from his salad, "surely a *brave-des-braves* like you cannot be scared by a poor, innocent butterfly?"

"A poor, innocent butterfly!" mocked Tatiana. "You make me laugh! *Vieux grognard* though I may be, I don't like white moths with three or four or five—I didn't count—but they were there—black bars across their wings. You don't remember, I suppose, that those are unshriven souls wandering sorrowfully about in hope to find a holy priest to bless them; and truly if I were to hear that something untoward has happened to somebody, I wouldn't be a bit astonished."

Salvières stared at his wife. "Tatiana," he chided, half laughingly, "how can you? Moreover, I rather fancy your way of blessing unshriven souls. To flap your sleeves in their faces is scarcely courteous under the circumstances."

"Good Lord! Jean, please don't make fun! I feel queer, I tell you; and if you will only hurry with your dessert and coffee—and of course your *Kümmel*—dear me, you *are* slow feeders!—we can go into the garden and send all evil forebodings to the moon. As she is a cloud-devourer, she can doubtless make shift to swallow them, too."

"Into the garden?" both men said at once. "It is too cool there for you in your evening gown."

"Well, then, 'Polo,' ring for Marie to get me a fur-lined *pelisse*—a long one down to the feet—with straps, if possible, to button beneath my heels, and a hood attached. Remember the hood! I had no idea I was so delicate; however, since you both think so— But wait, Marie must be dining; I don't want you to disturb her."

Salvières and Pavlo were laughing, and the lad was in the act of going to fetch a scarf himself when a footman carrying a telegram entered.

MOONGLADE

"For Monsieur le Duc," he said. Tatiana sat down abruptly on the nearest chair, her face suddenly white. Pavlo stopped short, looking at her concernedly, and Salvières quickly tore open the message.

Very carefully he refolded the tinted sheet, replaced it in its envelope, and, turning to the man waiting in readiness with pad and pencil, said, "No answer," in his ordinary matter-of-fact tone; then he offered his arm to his wife.

"Let us go to your little salon," he calmly remarked. Pavlo, without a word or question, followed his parents, looking perturbed, as though he felt that his joking prognostications had come true.

"And now," Salvières said, after closing the boudoir door behind them, "here comes a very pretty bit of news. Don't take it unnecessarily to heart, Tatiana. Laurence has run away with Preston Wynne on her yacht, destination unknown. Régis de Plenhœl telegraphs me not to allow Basil to find this out, since as yet there has been no public scandal." He paused and glanced first at his wife and then at his son. "Well?" he added, after a second.

Pavlo made a helpless little gesture with his hands, as one utterly at a loss to find adequate words; Tatiana rose quickly and whirled toward her husband.

"What did I tell you?" she cried. "Misfortune over misfortune around that unfortunate child's head. The wretched woman! Oh, the villain! My poor Basil and—that poor Mr. Wynne, too! What a fool!"

"You are the only person in the world," Salvières observed, "who could make one feel like laughing at such a catastrophe. What in the name of all common sense induces you to pity Wynne?"

"Why," Tatiana rejoined, her eyes sparkling with anger, "because he is such a nice chap; so was that young Moray; and, moreover, because I never blame the

MOONGLADE

man in such affairs. It is the woman who is invariably the guilty party, and it is *so* easy to behave oneself, especially when one has a good and good-looking husband. Besides, fancy any man landing that Laurence on his back for the rest of his natural existence—without being obliged to do so. A second Basil! Good Lord!”

Salvières took her strong little hand in his and patted it; but she was in no mood for tenderness, and, tearing herself away, she began to pace the floor, speaking as she moved.

“I have no patience with misconduct—inexcusable misconduct—like this! A cold-blooded coquette ruining life after life, dishonoring everybody concerned with her. How do you suppose that Basil will ever accept little Piotr as his now, after this new proof of Laurence’s incorrigible lightness? And—oh! but it is too atrocious! Now Basil will kill Preston Wynne, too! He does not joke about such things, as he has proved.”

“*À qui le dites vous!*” muttered Salvières, and continued, louder: “As luck will have it, your brother is in China or thereabouts, and it is not likely that he will hear of this for the present. Meanwhile, it seems to me that we should hurry our departure. Régis and I may be needed at any moment—indispensable, in fact. It stands to reason that that infernal woman will not turn her yacht’s nose toward the North Sea or any Mediterranean port. If you believe me she’s off to the States or to South America—and I wish it were the devil!” he wrathfully concluded.

“So do I,” assented Pavlo. “Between all of them they are worrying my little mother to pieces.”

“Nonsense!” protested Tatiana. “But it is true that this woman is really occupying too much room on the stage. Can’t she keep quiet? And Preston Wynne, we all took such a fancy to him when he came with Sir Robert and Lady Elizabeth to Salvières two years ago.

MOONGLADE

He was so gay, so amusing—by no manner of means the type of man one would expect to sacrifice his whole future for a worthless woman like Laurence.”

“Queer! He told me once he didn’t approve of divorce,” put in Salvières. “I distinctly remember his saying so, and even denouncing rather vividly the laxity in that respect in his own country. What’s he going to do with her? I wonder if she’ll ask him to marry her—and she by birth a Catholic and now an Orthodox? D’you think that after embracing so much she’ll end by embracing Protestantism as a much-needed ally?”

“Jean! But you are right. There’s no knowing what will happen now? What a pity! *Le petit* Wynne was a rarity! He knew how to behave; knew how to move about a drawing-room; knew how to eat and how not to drink too much; knew how to present himself and take leave; knew that one does not wear colored gaiters with a cut-away coat and a top-hat; knew that a boudoir is not a bedroom, but a—*boude-heure*—a place to go and sulk by the hour—which makes me think I’ve got a fine large one here, and at Salvières, too. It will come in useful to me now.”

“You—useful to you!” exclaimed Pavlo. Running to his mother and throwing his arm about her slim waist, he kissed her little flushed ear. “You sulk! I’d like to see you just once. It isn’t in your power. You simply can’t!”

“Oh, leave me alone!” she objected, but in a greatly mollified tone. “You are a *Schmeichler*; and what am I going to do without you, ‘Polo,’ during all these long months to come?”

There were tears in her eyes, and she turned almost brutally to conceal them; but her voice betrayed her, and in an instant the lad was humbly pleading for forgiveness.

“Oh, mother darling,” he said, contritely, catching

MOONGLADE

hold of her again, "I was a brute this afternoon. Of course I can obtain leave. What do they want with a kid like me? I was only showing off. I'll come with you and Papa if you'll let me, and glad enough I'll be, my own pretty mother dear."

He was once more to her the baby of yore, caressing and altogether delicious, and her heart gave a great bound.

"My dear, my dear!" she said, choking a little. "Do you think I'd really interfere with your career? Who'd you take me for? No, no! You'll come to us after the great manœuvres, and then enjoy your holidays without any qualms of conscience—a bad thing to take about on such occasions. But remember that I just adore you, my little 'Polo.' And now, Jean, when shall we start?"

"To-morrow if you can manage it," he replied, and she instantly acquiesced.

CHAPTER XVII

The pit-like dark, th' impassioned prayers and saintly
For souls abroad, the life-boat barely inned,
The desperate sirens laboring far and faintly
To pierce the wall of wind.

SALVIÈRES was at its very best when its owners arrived there with their little nephew—for even midsummer heat is on the Normandy coast entirely bearable—and more so. Like Plenhœl, it stands on a lofty cliff fronting a magnificent sea view. The Castle dates back to the early days of the Duchy, and is built in two, and in some parts in three, stories of singularly massive blocks of granite, with cloisters above and below—that is, on the side facing the open country and the Vallée de Salvières, which alone deserves quite a separate description, so unique and beautiful it is.

Of course it is quite needless to add that the Castle and its dependencies are of the purest and most ancient Gothic architecture. The *Salle des Chevaliers* is a marvelous place at the upper end of which an equestrian silver statue of the illustrious Knight Jehan de Salvières, first of the name, gleams in the prismatic lights of a huge *vitralle*, whose sunset tints of rich orange, vivid scarlet, lucent blue, and emerald green surround it with a glory of blinding color. The walls of the *enceinte* crown the whole promontory and inclose the immensity of château, chapel, towers, keep, *Cour-d'Honneur*, armory, and *place-d'armes*—not to mention an inner garden of such ex-

MOONGLADE

tent that its measurements would only court contradiction from those who have not seen it—which, to say the least, is a misfortune not to be atoned for by loudly proclaimed skepticism. At any rate, Salvières would be one of the most remarkable show-places of France and Navarre, more so than even St.-Michel, Josselin, Chenonceaux, or Chambord, *Le Château de la Reine Jeanne*, Couci, or Arthèze de Foix, were it not for the fact that neither Jean nor Tatiana, since their reign there, had cared to have a flock of Cook's tourists clattering over its beautiful floors, or measuring its art treasures by the length of their umbrellas with guttural yelps of amazement and wonder—when not exclamations of incredulity, and sometimes worse than incredulity, where religious pictures or objects of faith are concerned.

When at Palitzinovna the Salvières certainly kept great state, but when at Salvières they once more entered into the grandeur and splendor that belonged to this ancestral home, and that through the centuries had never yielded one iota to modernism except in what concerned creature comforts. There was an army of servants in attendance, a battalion of *gardes-chasses* and *gardes-forêtiers*, an almoner, a seneschal, a squad of halberdiers in antique costume. The stables contained no less than two hundred horses at all times, and the private harbor, in a small bay at the foot of the huge promontory, floated a steam-yacht, several yawls, and a regular fleet of other craft flying the ducal pennant. The village of Salvières, strange to state, has never once showed signs of accepting as a fact the republican form of government under which France labors. More stubborn than Bretons even—and that is saying the uttermost one can—the canny Normans, who according to the most ancient history can never be tricked into expressing an opinion, nodded their cotton-capped heads when addressed on that subject. "It might well be." "Perchance it was so." "Who

MOONGLADE

could tell?" "Ah! was that it?" So far they would concede; but, as they guilelessly added, they of Salvières knew none but their Duke (Jean might have been Sovereign Duke of Normandy, to hear them), "their own Duke," whose father and grandfather and great-great-great-great-grandfather had also been their suzerain back to times immemorial; so what did it matter whether in that blackguard Paris (*cette gueuse de Paris*) there sat in non-majesty a frock-coated man wearing—on state occasions—a broad scarlet cordon across his shirt-front and, mayhap, a pair of white spats on his plebeian feet? "They of Salvières" had naught to do with him, which, as they gave one to understand, was a mercy of the good God. The thriftiness of the Normans is as proverbial as their obstinacy and craft. Had the Republic's President prevented them from selling their fish, their eggs, their butter or apples to the best advantage, he might have been worth considering, but the Duc de Salvières was their liege-lord, a splendidly generous one at that, and so they were satisfied that all was well now and hereafter, which praiseworthy feelings were entirely pleasing to themselves and to him also.

Of course, Tatiana, ever since her advent there as a bride, had made herself idolized—not so easy a task in the land of the apple-orchards, for the people there do not wear their hearts as a sleeve-ornament. Her frank, boyish ways interwoven with crystal-pure high breeding, her complete fearlessness at sea and ashore, her prowess on horseback (they are mighty horse-breeders in Normandy) filled them with admiration; and the then mayor of the neighboring little town—who invariably pulled off his tasseled *bonnet-de-coton* when she met him in the exercise of his functions and apologized for wearing a tri-colored scarf about his vast middle—had once been heard to remark: "That Duchess isn't a foreigner, nor a stranger—not a bit—no, she is a thoroughbred *Normande*, born

MOONGLADE

farther north than we are, that's all!" This, for a wonder, perfectly straight and outspoken exposé of feeling, had won general and popular approval. Tatiana was accepted as a *Normande* from farther north, *V'là tout!* And so it had remained ever since.

Piotr, delighted to be back on the sea edge, was daily clamoring for his "little darling Malou"; and one fine evening Salvières, who had spent a few days at Plenhœl to confer with Régis about that idiotic elopement of Laurence, came home with him and the "Gamin." Piotr's explosions of joy at finding her again were so exuberant as to very nearly exhaust even Tatiana's long-suffering stock of patience with him. In her heart she was thinking: "It is not a child's enthusiasm; it is a real, *bona-fide* passion. What a pity Basil is not and never will be free!"

Marguerite was still wholly unchanged. "A smiling moonglade," Salvières once paraphrased, gazing at her as she stood with her arm about Piotr's neck on the wide balcony of the *Salle des Chevaliers*, watching the stars appear one by one in the ultramarine sky above the rocking waters of the Channel. Slim and extraordinarily girlish in her white frock, she made a lovely silhouette against the blue infinite, and her clear laugh at some remark of the little boy's held no rift of disappointment or sadness. That she had suffered, and suffered deeply, was no longer a secret to Salvières or Tatiana, and scarcely so even to Régis the optimist, but no allusion from any of them had ever disturbed her quietude and admirable self-control. It goes without saying that she had not been told about Laurence's escapades. The death of Captain Moray had been discreetly announced as due to an accident, the separation of Basil from his wife as a mere temporary convenience, since Laurence's dislike of long travels had prevented her from accompanying her husband to Mongolia; but when Piotr arrived with his aunt and uncle at Salvières, her good sense had told her that

MOONGLADE

there must be something that was purposely being kept from her. Indeed, the little chap had at once explained to her that "mamma" had left Tverna all of a sudden without "papa," and that "papa"—but this she at first did not believe—had gone away afterward, "very angry and frowning awfully, without kissing him, Piotr." But when challenged by that precocious infant to ask the faithful Garrassime if this was not the exact truth, she had forborne to do so, warned by something in the old man's attitude that he would not speak to her about the matter, and by her own feelings that it was better for her, in any case, to remain in ignorance of the real state of affairs.

All this grew to be extremely unreassuring, but the "Gamin's" courage was not of a common order. As a matter of fact it might, without the least exaggeration, have been called Spartan, for her smile was never shadowy, her bearing never languid, and soon she was the very soul of the old castle by the sea, as she had always been that of Plenhœl.

So did the days at Salvières slip like bright beads from a many-colored necklace; one by one, diversified by excursions, rides, drives to the old abbeys and shrines with which that province of France is dotted, picnics in the forest or on the caverned shore, sails on the amusingly choppy water, and chases after elusive crawfish by lantern-light up the course of the cool little river that flows across the immense estate. Piotr seemed to have lost his regrettable propensity for sudden fits of fury, and was the happiest little creature on earth. Jean and Tatiana, cheered by Régis's unfailing good-temper and rose-colored way of looking at things—especially as they felt certain that Basil had so far heard nothing of the latest developments—breathed more easily.

"The calm before the storm," Garrassime, whom nothing escaped, said to himself. He had no confidence in the future, but he wisely kept his own counsel.

MOONGLADE

At the beginning of September a succession of squalls ended by a regular gale of the type which churns the Channel into amazing emotions. The North Sea and the Atlantic, hereditary enemies as they are, never miss an occasion to dash at each other's throats on what they evidently consider a stretch of neutral water; and when this warring at close range begins, both coasts had best draw in their horns, for there is certain to occur what the Bretons and Normans call graphically "*de la casse.*"

* * * * *

Several wrecks had been reported, and the life-saving station at Salvières, lavishly endowed and equipped by Jean—for there are long stretches of bare shore on either side of the Castle where no government *bâteau de sauvetage* is housed—was, so to speak, day and night on the alert. On the fourth day of the gale (and according to the weather-wise there, if a gale lasts thrice over twenty-four hours, it is a bad business) the entire household was awakened about four in the morning by the appalling noise of a storm such as even in that region is something of a rarity. Mountainous waves escalated the cliff, slaving with rage at their incapacity to scale them entirely; the wind raised so hoarse a voice that one could not hear oneself talk, even in a closed room with walls all of nine feet thick; and the air outside was so dense with spume and flying spindrift that the night had grown old without the faintest hint of dawn.

Assembled in the *Salle des Chevaliers*, the family and a number of servants awaited God only knew what! There was an impression of disaster in the all-embracing clangor which none could overlook or disregard, used as they all were to similar manifestations, and as the bell for matins faintly pierced the uproar, all filed laboriously along the cloisters into the chapel where the Abbé de Kerdren, the Duke's cousin and chaplain, was kneeling on the altar steps.

MOONGLADE

He rose as they entered and faced round toward them, his hands still clasped and his finely modeled features looking white and drawn in the yellow light of the blessed candles—a tall and martial figure, whose vestments took upon him the look of knightly coat-armor, for he had begun life as a naval officer, and had only entered holy orders after the death of his bride of two months, killed in a hunting accident.

"Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae," he began, raising his voice, for here too the roar of sea and wind was deafening.

Jean and Marguerite, kneeling side by side on the purple cushions of the last step—Tatiana and Régis with Piotr between them were close to the draped rail—could scarcely hear the prayer, and as she whispered it on her moonstone beads she suddenly thought of one line in a ballad that she loved and often sang:

Father, save those at sea to-night.
Miserere Domine!

Was it profane to have thought of that just now? Strenuously she tried to force herself out of that train of thought, but the words of matins, of the morning prayer, oddly eluded her, and instead she found herself repeating mechanically the "*recommendation*" for a departing soul:

*"Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison
Sancta-Maria, Ora pro eo . . ."*

What ailed her, she wondered, and hastily she implored:

*"Pax huic domini
Et omnibus habitantibus in ea—"*

giving the response in the same breath as the "*supplication*" in her sudden and unaccountable distress.

Sheets of rain were sluicing against the painted win-

MOONGLADE

dows of the little church—rain that, caught up by the frantic wind, slanted before it and struck almost horizontally at the glass. Again without very explainable reasons Marguerite shivered and went on praying fervently until the blast paused, as if to take breath. And then there happened during that sinister lull one of those phenomena that landsmen so seldom see, for a storm-light—snatched from the sun rising somewhere out of view beyond the cloud-roof that still closed down the darkness upon the world—smote the great rose-window behind the high altar with a dull orange jet of flame that for an instant seemed to set it on fire. It sank, flared up once more for the beat of a heart, fell, and was replaced by a flashing zigzag of intensely brilliant green, seen and lost in the same breath while it bisected the gold-and-white *fleur-de-lys*èd glass of the upper window.

Marguerite felt she must be dreaming, but at her side she saw Salvières rise quickly to his feet, and she imitated him. The abbé was just pronouncing the last *Amen*, and with his face turned toward the altar he had also seen, for after a rapid genuflection he joined the others.

"A wreck somewhere!" he brusquely stated, as he almost ran down the side-steps, his hand at the fastening of his surplice, his sea-blue eyes wide with the passion of his first profession—a sailor from head to foot—in a cassock!

It did not take them long to wrap themselves in oil-skins and don sou'westers: Salvières, Régis, and the abbé. The great alarm-bell of the Castle, already sounding tocsin-wise, succeeded in overtoning the tempest by dismal fits and starts. Marguerite ran along the cloisters, snatched up a hooded coat, and, followed breathlessly by Garrassime (who had left Piotr in the Duchess's care), made at full speed for the *chemin de ronde* outside the chancel. The men of the house were no longer in sight, and as soon as she turned the corner to the cliff-path she

MOONGLADE

caught the full force of the wind and tried to battle against it; but at first she could not succeed, and was forced to fall back under the lee of a buttress. By then Garrassime had caught up with her. "Don't go, Illustrious; don't!" he tried to shout, but a gust swooped down his throat and he stood gasping beside her, wiping the rain from his eyes.

The wind was whooping louder, whirling in waves of swiftness and sound now close to the ground, now high up aloft—a regular typhoon of a storm—and it was dark as pitch, too, for even the ghastly storm-light had disappeared, swallowed by the tempest. Twice Marguerite attempted to peer around the angle of the buttress, her hand shielding her eyes, and twice she was flung back; but something impelled her forward again, some premonition she could not understand; and all at once in the chaos beyond, as, clutching the rough granite, she was bending half across its sharp edge, she saw a tear in the blackness, a stripe of pulsating red—to the east of north—a flash of blinding green, and then a tossing ball of whiteness that might be a masthead light.

A wreck? Yes, a wreck, and what could live in such a sea? If there was a sinking boat out there in the darkness, with men clinging desperately to the rigging, they had best not pray for human help—that she knew—and she sent a glance heavenward where no heaven was to be seen. A dreadful fear for her paladin of a father, for Jean de Salvières, for the sailor-abbé whom she revered and loved with all her heart, shot through her to add to her wretchedness. She was aware that, peril or no peril, they would not hesitate a second to do much more than their duty: and at last, detaching herself from the protection of the huge wall, she battled on, half creeping, leaning against the gusts, fighting every inch of the way to the cliff edge. Down the sheer face of the rock to the narrow beach of pebbles below, where in half an

MOONGLADE

hour the breakers would be thundering, ran an iron cable—a short cut on ordinary occasions for sailors and coast-guards; but just now a mere vibrating thread stretched downward to the Pit. She had stumbled many times and fallen twice, for the path was slippery as ice, and as her hand came in contact with the stanchion she paused to listen; Garrassime at her shoulder, braced and rigid like a tree, holding her with both arms for fear she would be carried over the ghastly brink.

Another rocket, then another, and another. A little sob choked Marguerite, straining her eyes in the slowly, slowly dragging dawn that now was beginning to make the gloom more visible. She was at home in storms—a child of the tempest, Régis often said—and for herself she was not caring; but when gradually she began to discern away down there on the foam-flecked shingle two darker masses, evidently the life-boats and a throng of men fighting forward to the launching, all possible difficulty was wiped out of her mind, and, tearing herself free from Garrassime, she started forward.

“Mother of God!” roared the Russian, his gray hair fairly bristling on his head. “You are not going to try that!” But Marguerite, holding to the cable-head, was peering downward for the first of the unequal footholds cut in the rock, and his voice was lost in those of wind and sea. Under her long coat she wore a woollen gown made in a single piece, a handy garment she had hastily put on when she had been roused by the storm, so, merely kicking off her little sodden slippers, and before he could more effectually interpose himself, she was over and already descending, her face to the cliff, her back to the unseen void. Garrassime was a strong man, but no sailor; besides, he was so tall and heavy that to follow her would mean sure destruction for both of them; but he suddenly remembered a fissure that slanted down the cliff-side some two hundred yards further on, and, praying with

MOONGLADE

all his might that she might be spared, he ran for it—bent nearly double beneath the terrible weight of the wind, his heart beating with anguish against his ribs—anguish for her whom he had learned to worship, the dear, sweet, daring, foolhardy little lady of Plenhöel.

Through wildly tossing clouds the eastern sky was now showing faintly gray, and the "Gamin" began to see the notches that she touched one after another with her silk-shod feet. She must be half-way now, and, sparing her breath, clinging hard, flattening her little body to the dripping crag, she doggedly continued to crawl down, hearing dully the clang of the tocsin far, far above her head.

"Ah," she suddenly cried, aloud, "I am in the water! The tide must be coming fast!"

She let go the cable from her torn and bleeding palms, turned around, leaning against the base of the rock, and searched the maddened sea—white as a *tourmente* of snow. No! there was no sign of a ship on the tossing froth, save two black spots appearing and disappearing convulsively in the spouting water—the life-boats she knew—but whether they were coming shoreward or going out toward some invisible point she could not tell. Determined to see better, she climbed half a dozen of the wet steps again and gazed fixedly seaward. At last something flecked with white and red, she thought, caught her eye; it was rolling in and out among the breakers, and behind it there were other objects lugubriously bobbing up and down. She jumped, and ran plungingly toward the thing nearest to the beach, finally wading thigh-deep in the broken back-wash of the flooding tide; snatched desperately at the queer bundle, and dragged it ashore, pulling it up after her with all her strength. Gasping for breath, she stopped at the shingle-top, and before investigating what she held she set her teeth. A white serge skirt, two narrow stockinged feet, a torrent of drenched hair! She turned it over, trembling violently, and, falling on her

MOONGLADE

knees, saw the beautiful features—unspoiled, unscarred even, and strangely sculptural—of Laurence Palitzin. On her breast, embroidered across the white jersey, the words *Wild Rose*—the name of her yacht—made Marguerite cry out with a new horror. For a moment she crouched there, seeking mechanically for the heart, the wrist, of this first victim recovered; but she could find no sign of life; and, tears running down her face mingling with the rain and brine, she asked herself how she could at least save the body before the galloping flood claimed it again. Of herself she had no time to think, and at that minute, clambering out of the fissure, Garrassime stumbled toward her with reckless haste. Before she had either heard or seen him he was at her side, had caught up the body of his lost mistress—which a life-belt still encircled in futile mockery—and, drawing Marguerite by the hand, was hastening to the higher beach near the life-station's weed-grown stairs.

Just then, riding a tremendous wave, the first life-boat—the one that bore Tatiana's name—toppled half-over as it took the shore, and Marguerite vaguely saw her father and her uncle Jean leap into the whirling water, and receive from the abbé's arms another limp and apparently lifeless body that somehow seemed all dislocated; but by this time the girl was past all emotion and listlessly looked on as they plunged forward with their burden.

It was as full daylight by now as it would be that morning, and the dimness that fell from the sky and rose from the sea showed with astonishing precision the helpless form in soaked white flannels, the head thrown back and rolling horribly from side to side. Who it was she did not care. She watched the grim procession of *sauve-teurs* carrying more bodies, saw the other life-boat rush up almost atop of its companion, and the abbé turn again to the swirling tide to see if yet more derelicts were floating up with it. Then she found herself, somehow or

MOONGLADE

other, in the round room of the "Station," staring at something upon an already dripping truckle-bed, and Régis and Jean bending over a placid white face with closed, dark-fringed lids, and a relaxed mouth into which some one was attempting to pour brandy.

It was all so much like a nightmare that once or twice Marguerite shook herself as if to waken her palsied faculties. Surely she had seen that face before. Where? When? Ah! at Lady Seton's in the Meurice apartment a night some few centuries ago. . . .

*Malgré les brisants—et l'orage
Il atteint la côte . . .*

Had she not sung that herself?

*Pauvre P'tit Gas!
Pauvre P'tit Gas!*

She roused with a shiver. "Preston Wynne!" she muttered, her teeth chattering. "What is he doing here?"

The Salvières doctor, who had been there all the time, it appeared, had taken possession of Preston Wynne, and Garrassime was pulling her gently away. He was not dead then? "*Pauvre P'tit Gas!*"

The others, for whom there was no hope, were being piled like cord-wood in the other room of the "Station," where the life-savers on duty watched all night; but she passed this new horror with scarce a glance—quite passive now, leaning a little against Garrassime as he led her away; while Régis and Jean, the doctor and the abbé, tirelessly pursued their energetic ministrations.

At last a faint tinge of color began to underly the lividity of Preston's face, his eyelids moved ever so slightly; in a short while he feebly tried to resist the ordeal of resuscitation he was passing through—the agonies of rebirth—under those skilled fingers. Then the young doctor, sweat dripping from his forehead, paused in his

MOONGLADE

exhausting work just long enough to murmur, hoarsely: "He will live, I think, but I fear he is badly hurt."

They did not question him—standing ready to help when the medical man should take up his task again. Salvières was watching intently the spasmodic changes of expression upon Preston's drawn white features.

"A little more brandy, please," the doctor said; and the abbé held out the flask and raised the patient's head with deft precaution. This time he swallowed a few drops voluntarily, it seemed, and the doctor, bending his ear to the blue lips until it almost touched them, heard the words, "Is it you?"

"Who do you want?" he asked, slowly and very distinctly; but Preston's mouth closed tight with a queer, distressed droop.

All at once his eyes opened and he fell to staring at the heavy oaken beams crisscrossing the ceiling. Presently they closed again, and he fell to whispering softly in that brainless self-absorption that characterizes the sayings of unconsciousness:

"I'll catch you—jump! A fool— Yes! God—I've not lived according to the Pure Food Law lately. Laurence, where are you? Get busy. . . there's no time!"

The four men around the bed glanced at one another. To two of them, Régis and Salvières, who had known Preston in other days, this persistent and purely mechanical survival of originality in speech verged on the sinister, and they turned about with a simultaneous motion. They felt like running away.

The abbé had knelt down by the bed and was whispering something that the others could not hear, so they drew back farther yet.

"You say he will live?" Salvières asked of the young doctor.

"Yes—that is, I think so, Monsieur le Duc," was the guarded answer. "But I am almost certain that there

MOONGLADE

is some grave injury to the spine; the lower part of the body seems—inert.”

“Struck on a rock or on a bit of wreckage, you think?”

“Very likely. But one can’t tell yet without a more thorough examination. Where did you find him, Monsieur le Marquis?” the young medico asked of Régis.

“Caught him on the rebound, as it were,” the latter replied, “from the heart of a wave. I saw an arm dark against the foam by the light of our lanterns, and grabbed at it. It was not so difficult, though the force of the pull nearly wrenched my own arm out of its socket.”

The doctor nodded. “I dare not move him until I can find out what is really the matter. He must be kept here for the present.”

He was interrupted by the opening of the door. On the sill stood the captain of the life-savers, one rough hand to the dripping brim of his sou’wester.

“*Pardon, Monsieur le Duc,*” he said, “another live un with a broken arm brought ashore. He is here outside. He says he’s the first mate of the *Wild Rose*.”

“Ah,” muttered Salvières, “perhaps now we can hear how all this came to pass.” And with a quick caution to Régis he hurried into the passage.

The man standing outside the door, one arm hanging limply at his side, was white under his tan and glistening with wet. He was a handsome chap above the middle height, with a trim blond beard cut to a point in naval style, clear gray eyes, and—even in this crisis—a rather proud way of carrying his head.

Salvières looked sharply at him. The horrors of that terrible summer night, the long swim ashore, and the pain of his hurt had left their mark quite unmistakably on the second-in-command of the big steam-yacht that had just foundered; but this did not affect the impassiveness so well in keeping with the square jaw and firm lips of the man.

“When the doctor has set your arm I wish to have a

MOONGLADE

talk with you," Salvières said. "Sit down. I'll fetch you some brandy"; and he pointed to the stone bench running along the wall.

"Sit down"; he repeated, but there was no answer. Through the thick panes of one of the round windows, the mate was staring across the lashed waters at the foot of the promontory whereon the "Station" stood, his square chin thrust forward, his resolute lips compressed.

"Keeping the Penvan light east-southeast, and having the South Bay Rock west by north, we should have found the gullet even in such weather," he said, slowly, without looking again at Salvières.

"Yes," the latter assented. "Who was master?" He had sent a message to the doctor to come as soon as he could, and now stood motionless beside the sailor.

"Captain Braines—an Englishman, who had never made a mistake in seamanship—stainless record." The tone was monotonous but convincing.

"Yes," Salvières said again, "but don't speak now; wait till you feel better." And he handed him the tumbler the captain of the life-station had just brought.

"I can answer your questions now, sir."

"Better not till a bit later. Ah, here's the doctor"; and, pulling off his coat, Salvières prepared to assist him.

An hour after, as Salvières and his cousin were stepping upon the Castle esplanade, a footman—fighting the wind, his powdered head bent to the blast and much the worse for wear—met them at a run, clutching a telegram tightly in his fist.

"What now!" grumbled Salvières, taking refuge in a mullioned doorway and tearing the envelope open with his damp fingers.

Am coming to you at once. Received infamous news in Shanghai from my agent. Send wireless as soon as feasible P. O. S. S. *Mondoria*, giving latest facts and destination of *Wild Rose* in cipher. Make all possible inquiries meanwhile. BASIL.

MOONGLADE

Salvières stared for a full minute at the paper trembling in his hand, and then passed it silently to Régis.

His sou'wester pushed back, his blond mustache falling on both sides of his mouth à la *Vercingetorix*, the Marquis de Plenhœl said nothing at all, very emphatically.

"Right you are!" assented Salvières, just as if he had spoken. "Come, we have work to do." As, indeed, they had, and, following the line of least resistance, they finally found themselves engulfed by a side entrance.

In the central hall they were met by Tatiana and Marguerite. Both were very pale and very collected, and their voices were perfectly calm. Piotr, they explained, was asleep, with Garrassime on watch. "The—Laurence"—here Tatiana faltered a little—"has been placed in a *chapelle - ardente*. She—she is very beautiful; the sea has been merciful." And now her heroes—she dwelt tenderly upon that word—must change into dry clothes and eat something warm and comforting. She glanced anxiously at her husband, then at Régis, and felt, with her marvelous instinct, that there was some new and startling development; but this wise woman asked no questions, and was satisfied to busy herself with what she specified as "first aid to the deserving." They needed it by this time, of that there could be no doubt, and it was only when completely revived and limbered up by hot bath and cold shower, and steaming coffee with a gracious accompaniment of more substantial viands, followed by a refreshing smoke, that they felt quite equal to assembling the necessarily narrow *conseil-de-famille* that should decide upon immediate steps. Naturally Marguerite was excluded, for the questions under discussion were not of the sort one can bring to maidenly ears, but the Abbé de Kerdren was called in, and those four—Tatiana, Jean, Régis, and the sailor-priest—sat down before a glorious driftwood-fire in the library to attain some conclusion.

Basil was coming back as fast as steam could bring him,

MOONGLADE

his brain afire with wrath and humiliation, determined beyond a doubt to punish the guilty betrayed to him by his faithful and indiscreet agent. The guilty? Tatiana thought of the still, white form in the chapel—that sculptured beauty on the silver brocades of her fast couch, between the tall candlesticks burning their pale-yellow flames amid sheaves of snowy flowers. The abbé, Régis, and Jean remembered the quietly delirious man in his strange sick-room at the foot of the cliffs, awaiting unknowingly the verdict of the great physicians telegraphed for to Paris—and there was a silence pregnant with pain and wretchedness. Ah, surely the punishment had already been dealt by stronger hands than Basil's!

Up-stairs little Piotr, ignorant of what new complications Fate was weaving around his baby existence, was playing now with Garrassime—Garrassime moving as in a dream, his honest heart well-nigh broken by so many repeated blows.

Salvières explained that during the second interview he had just had with the *Wild Rose's* first mate in the Castle infirmary, he had discovered that after a cruise in the Mediterranean, among the Ionian Islands, and back to Gibraltar, Princess Laurence had crossed the straits to Tangier, where she had hired a Moorish house inclosed by an impenetrable rampart of cactus, and set upon the flank of a fortress-like hillock beyond the Sôk, and outside the city gates, beyond the spot where the East and the West rub shoulders. The *Wild Rose* lay at anchor on the still bosom of the bay, at the least conspicuous moorings that could be found—this by the special command of the Princess. Every evening Captain Braines or the first mate went up to the house for orders, more often than once walking out of town by the Mazàn and the dusky lanes shadowed by sweeping cedars and hedged by prickly-pear. The mate had a natural picturesqueness of

MOONGLADE

expression which Salvières faithfully reproduced as he retold the tale. To hear him it was difficult to realize that Laurence's hiding-place was but a few short miles away from Europe as the swallow flies across that sunlit strait. The house, it seemed, had been luxurious. The Princess, served by her own confidential servants brought with her on the yacht, had never left its seclusion, but spent her time in the queer, fragrant old garden, with its ever-splashing fountains and irregular bosquets of palms and flowering trees, where roses and camellias made a blaze of color in the day, and the big Oriental moon cast its triumphant glamour at night. There she had lain in a hammock, apparently wasting her beauty upon the almost awesome solitude of the place, until one evening when the captain, walking up the path of crushed shells between the high thickets, had seen a man rise hastily and disappear behind a clump of ilexes. The bluff Englishman had told the mate of this incident on coming aboard, in shocked and very strong language, but, contrary to expectation, the days had passed without further developments. Two weeks later, however, the Princess had bidden the captain be ready to take to sea again, and twenty-four hours afterward the *Wild Rose* had steamed out of Tangier, bound for the Azores, carrying, besides its former contingent, a very good-looking young man, who was, so it was said, her Serene-Highness's newly engaged secretary, an Englishman; by name Preston Harrington.

Throughout the trip the Princess, who had evidently taken a sudden turn toward literature, had been closeted in her own suite with "Mr. Harrington" for many hours a day, dictating, doubtless, the novel to which she freely referred when talking to the captain, whom she daily honored with a visit on the bridge. It was to be—she claimed—the work of her life, a great-lady way of avoiding *ennui* in this weary, weary existence of plenitude.

It had leaked out, however, as such things are over-

MOONGLADE

apt to do, that the Azores were but a pretext, a port of call on the way to the States; that "Mr. Harrington" was in reality an American, and that his post of secretary had not been adopted for the sake of obtaining a remunerative position, since his pockets were royally filled, as was testified by the munificence of his tips to every man-jack of the crew and engine-room. He had made himself well liked, too, and had gained the brevet title of a "real gentleman" among them. Also he was a splendid sailor, visibly used to a pleasing existence on a yacht of extreme luxuriousness.

Once or twice the mate himself had heard voices raised to the pitch of anger in the saloon, when keeping his midnight watch on deck, and had greatly wondered, but reported nothing of what he had discovered. Once, as a matter of fact, he had unwillingly caught a sentence of the Princess: "I will not go with you to America! We must find some other place!" And the answer in "Harrington's" lower tones: "I don't care where we go. *You* must decide. You know very well that now I am utterly in your hands."

A short sojourn at the Azores, spent mostly on the yacht, and then orders to steam back again to Europe. Célèste, her Highness's French maid, had chatted about Norway to one of the quartermasters who was a Norwegian, and had let fall that her mistress, already sickened of sub-tropical landscapes, would spend the end of the summer in the Fjords. There was no longer peace on board, however. Laurence scowled savagely during meal-times, as was asserted by the head steward and his understrappers. "Mr. Harrington" looked grim and worried by turns, and the admirably trained, carefully selected crew gossiped between themselves, just as if they had been the most ordinary passenger-steamer lot; only their faces remained aristocratically wooden, and their tongues reduced to pianissimo expressions.

MOONGLADE

On nearing Europe the *Wild Rose* had encountered dirty weather of the midsummer kind, the most trying for seafarers to bear, and the Princess had signified to her captain that her next point of destination would be Trondhjem. Then suddenly he had been summoned to her "study" and had received orders not to go by way of the English Channel.

Greatly surprised, Captain Braines had respectfully pointed out to her that any other route would be a round-about one, if Norway was really her Highness's destination; but evidently apprehensive of meeting other yachts in those much-traveled waters, she had objected with her usual stubbornness, and only by protesting the lateness of the season had the captain finally succeeded in gaining his point. Beaten by contrary winds, the *Wild Rose* had entered the Channel, and had attempted to seek shelter from the final tempest in some French port. Fog-banks of impenetrable thickness and terrible cross-seas had been her portion, and then—the end! The first mate confessed that the unreasonableness of the Princess, her incomprehensible behavior in the teeth of imminent peril, had unmanned the crew and shaken even the captain himself, though "Mr. Harrington's" cool courage and resourcefulness in a desperate situation might have still saved her had she but listened to him. The rest of the recital was mere maritime detail—a welter of raging waters, the gnashing teeth of breakers—and of no present interest, so Salvères leaned back in his chair and took the cigarette his wife silently handed to him.

And what could they all do now? That was the grievous point. What would be the dictum of the "Princes of Science" summoned to Salvères? How conceal the true identity of Preston Wynne, granted that the Ducal doctor was correct in his fears of permanent disablement? There was Basil, too, to reckon with. Perhaps he would hear or read of the disaster to the *Wild*

MOONGLADE

Rose before reaching France, whither he was journeying, knowing that the de Salvières were in Normandy. They looked sadly at one another, these people who a few short months before had all been so happy.

The afternoon was far advanced, and the weather had sensibly moderated, when the carriage departed to fetch the medical men from the nearest railway station. They were coming on a special train, for no time was to be lost in mercy to Preston, who, still wandering in his mind, was in charge of two nursing sisters on the narrow truckle-bed that the life-savers used, turn and turn about, to snatch a wink or so of sleep during their nights on duty.

Marguerite had devoted herself to the amusement of Piotr; a difficult Piotr to-day, rendered peevish by his disturbed night's rest, impossible to please, restive as the unbroken colt he was. At last she came down, very pale in her white dinner-dress, and a trifle ghostly as she glided along the inner gallery to the glassed-in terrace where all were waiting. "Moonglade?" yes, but a very faint presentment of her usual "crystal and silver" self, to quote Tatiana. Her father, who had been pacing restlessly up and down between the two arched, creeper-garlanded entrances of this sublimized conservatory, went forward and threw his arm about her shoulders. He said nothing, but suddenly bent his tall form and kissed her above the eyebrow, his eyes full of pity as he noticed the small hands, gloved to the elbow, so as to hide the thin bandages beneath. She had been cruelly torn by that rusty cable in sliding down the cliff, and he was far from reassured.

Everybody spoke to her that night, and for days to follow, in a tender, careful manner, as though afraid to touch upon too sensitive a point, of hurting her in some way; and it was in an almost hesitating tone that Tatiana asked her just then whether she felt able to take her place for an hour or so, later on, while she herself went down

MOONGLADE

with the doctors, Jean, the abbé, and Régis, to be present at their examination of the wounded man.

"Why, of course, 'Aunt' Tatiana!" she replied, smiling nearly as usual. "I'll be only too glad to be of use."

Tatiana glanced curiously at her. "Of use? What was the 'Gamin' ever else but useful to all those she loved, and to many others besides?"

CHAPTER XVIII

Sweet Ligia sang, and as I passed
I was not fettered to the mast.

By the blinding light of two hurricane-lamps the eminent surgeons were bending over their patient. Deftly, gently, rapidly they turned and touched him here and there, their inscrutable, clean-shaven, clever faces close together, directing by an occasional short word the Salvières doctor, who was proudly serving as assistant to these great men. Beyond the brilliant circle of light stood Tatiana, turning her wedding-ring round and round her finger, her eyes fixed upon it as if her life depended upon the exactness of its fit. Jean, Régis, and the abbé had retreated to the recess, where the round windows shone back at them like mirrors. The setting down of a stethoscope or of a measuring-tape in its little metal wheel upon the deal table near the bed, made the nerves of every person present thrill. The minutes dragged like weary hours, and the silky sound of the rain falling from the slate roof to the paving of the narrow-walled inclosure about the station was distinctly exasperating.

"Can he hear—understand?" Tatiana whispered to her private physician as he crossed before her to get something from a side-shelf.

"No, Madame la Duchesse," answered one of the Paris miracle-workers who had heard, stepping to her side. "That will pass, however; it is merely the effect of shock."

"And," she ventured, with great pleading eyes raised

MOONGLADE

to his cold, clear ones, "will the—the injury be hard to heal?"

The man of science did not reply at once. He was of the opinion that unpleasant news is worse than useless to communicate to the great of this world; a delicate coat of fine gold should, according to him, always mask the bitterness of the pill; but the hardening of her gaze made him attend, and quickly.

"*Pas de bêtises, docteur*," she said, harshly. "I want the truth. We are responsible, my husband and I, so pray don't shilly-shally; speak out."

"Believe me, Madame la Duchesse, nothing is further from my mind than to lead you astray." There was a fine curl of deprecation on his thin upper lip. "But before my learned colleague and I have been enabled to take counsel together a decision on my part would be—er—premature—even discourteous, I may add."

Tatiana's slim foot tapped the granite floor impatiently. "How long will it take you to come to a—courteous understanding?" she demanded, taking a lightning-like distaste for this frigid person who was attempting to overawe her at ten thousand francs an hour.

Fortunately the eminent *confrère*, more tactful, and a man of the world, had listened with one ear, and now joined them.

"I think, Madame la Duchesse," he said, urbanely, "that a secret consultation is scarcely needed." The throwing of dust in his client's eyes, be they ever so *erhaben*—as the Germans call it—was not his habit. He posed, on the contrary, for a *docteur tant-mieux*—an optimist of the finest orient, scorning the school of the *tant-pis* medical man; and his critical mind could not but acknowledge that his colleague was exhibiting the bedside manner of a half-frozen frog, so, throwing a considerable amount of warmth into a tone already sympathetic, he resumed:

MOONGLADE

"I understand, Madame la Duchesse, that this gentleman is not related either to yourself or to Monsieur le Duc?"

"No," she snapped.

"It makes our task easier, of course, in telling you that violent contact with a hard substance has caused a deep-seated injury—to the lumbar vertebræ; in fact, I need not explain that this is extremely serious."

"Is there any hope of recovery?" she asked, feeling herself get dry-lipped at the horror of this condemnation.

"None at all!" the cheerful doctor asserted.

And just then from the bed came the poor, brainless voice.

'I tell you, Loris—jump. . . . Don't be afraid—you wanted this, you know. . . . I'd always hoped it might one day be said of me that I'd lived clean. I wasn't strait-laced as if I'd swallowed the Statue of Liberty up to her manly bosom. But it's too late now—there's no time. . . . Jump, Laurence—*jump!* I can tuck you under my arm. . . . Are you still afraid? . . . Don't you believe in a free United States—'

The hearers listened in silence. This *blague* and *bagout* so essentially Parisian were his, doubtless, by some curious trick of ancestry, but it was rather gruesome just then.

"Won't they laugh at home. . . !" The sickening drone went on. "I! caught in a double cross like this . . . good for crabs and evil tongues. . . . Great Scott! isn't that a treat!" He laughed a ghastly ringing laugh that suddenly choked in his throat, and gave a grimace of pain that brought the doctors back to his side.

"I thought he could not feel—anything?" Tatiana murmured, profoundly shocked. "If one must see him suffer too—"

"Reassure yourself, Madame la Duchesse. He does not really feel—as yet, and this wandering of the mind is quite natural. It is when he comes to himself that

MOONGLADE

your kindly task will be—er—difficult.” It was *Docteur Tant-Mieux* who spoke, rubbing the tips of his long surgical fingers together, as if washing his hands of all doubt on the subject.

“Is there,” *Salvières* said, coming forward, “any danger in moving him to more comfortable quarters?”

The two *confrères* glanced swiftly at each other. “Do you,” inquired the optimist, “see any risk, *Docteur de Partenay*, in the patient’s being carried to the château, as *Monsieur le Duc* so thoughtfully suggests?”

“Hummmm-m,” the pessimist hesitated. “Not a very great deal, provided the transportation is done on a water-mattress and by very careful bearers; but no doubt the infirmary of the Castle—about which I have heard so much”—here he bowed first to the Duke and then to the Duchess—“can be called upon for all appliances necessary.”

“And,” resumed *Salvières*, “will it be impossible, say in a few days, to put the—patient on a yacht and take him back to his own land? He—he—is an American.”

“In this season, *Monsieur le Duc*, *la belle saison*,” the great man addressed responded, visibly undeterred by a newly awakened squall that was shrieking its way around and around the “Station,” “I should say not; but with your permission my colleague and I will answer your question after a second examination of the patient, when he has been removed from here. You have no doubt considered the necessity of our spending the night at *Salvières*.”

“Certainly,” *Tatiana* and *Jean* exclaimed together. “*Jean*,” she went on, “will you be so good as to give orders to have ‘*Mr. Harrington*’ moved to the *Louis XI.* suite on the ground floor of the west wing. The ground floor will be advisable, messieurs, is it not so? Besides, it is in the newer portion of the house and very comfortably installed,” and she turned to the doctors.

MOONGLADE

To this they agreed, much impressed, in spite of their professional phlegm, by the simplicity with which this Duchess referred to a wing dating back five hundred years as the "newer portion" of her Castle.

Two hours later the transit had been accomplished and Preston Wynne was resting in the high-ceiled room where once the King of "many watches" had slept. The doctors' opinion before their departure the next morning—by means of another special train, their valuable presence being peremptorily required in Paris—was to the effect that "Mr. Harrington" would in all human probability recover consciousness within the next few hours. They would, as promised, despatch a medical student *de troisième année* to Salvières, as also an orderly, to take full charge of the patient and accompany him to America, were the voyage decided upon. Money, they were told, was no object, and so they might well believe when thinking of the plethoric cheques folded in their respective pocket-books! Hope of complete or even partial recovery, they repeated, there was none—none whatsoever—and it was with a heavy heart that Tatiana, after seeing them off, turned her steps to the sick-room.

Her feelings were hardly to be analyzed as she came to the bedside and looked long and intently at the boyish face on the low, hard pillow scarcely elevating it from the smoothly drawn sheet. With his eyes closed, his hair swept back from the forehead, very white, and breathing very softly, Preston Wynne seemed to have recovered some of childhood's lines. He was barely twenty-six, but just then he gave the impression of sixteen rather, and Tatiana sighed. "What a pity," she murmured; and quite in spite of herself, for she was a singularly merciful and forgiving woman, she felt a sudden wave of disgust sweep over her as she thought of Laurence lying in princely state in the old chapel, and of this

MOONGLADE

her fifth and last victim. Basil, Piotr, Marguerite, Neville, and now this poor young stranger who had, according to his own broken and wandering words, tried to resist her fascination. Had any one ever heard of such inconceivable ill-fortune, of such persistent mischance, as had befallen those who had loved her? Well, she had paid the price; not only of her peculiar reading of the plighted faith, but of that fault, perhaps far more heinous yet—a total lack of heart, of gratitude, and of motherhood. Still Tatiana could not bring it upon herself to say the “repose in peace” which comes so readily to Russian lips whenever they think of those that are no more, and, slipping into an arm-chair at the foot of Preston’s bed, she sat, her eyes fixed upon the quiet figure before her. A bunch of sun-rays, clean-washed by the storm, was thrusting its golden points through the lace of the undercurtains, and after a while Tatiana turned her eyes toward them, though her thoughts were far away. She did not notice the passing of the hours, and the light was beginning to veil itself when she suddenly became aware that Preston was awake and looking straight at her, perfectly calm and reasonable.

With a nervous start she rose and came closer to him. “How are you now?” she asked in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could summon to her assistance.

“I am all right, I believe, except that I feel lame all over,” he replied, smiling in that peculiarly winning fashion she had always liked. “We were wrecked—” he continued, puckering his brows in puzzlement. “When you moved, madame, I was just trying to piece the last few hours together.”

“Yes,” she encouraged, “but don’t do it too fast. You have gone through a great deal, Mr. Wynne, and rest is what you need most. Are you thirsty?”

“I am, thank you,” he said, still quite evenly; and as she took from the table a long glass with something cool in

it, he made a motion to raise himself on his elbow, desisted, and glanced inquiringly at her.

"Are my legs broken?" he queried.

She deftly passed her left arm under his head and put the glass to his lips.

"No," she said, her face hidden from him as she bent, "you broke no bones, marvelous to relate."

"That was lucky!" he admitted, but now there was not only surprise, but an odd wistfulness in his voice. "Still, I cannot move my legs at all. It's curious!"

"Not in the least; you were properly battered by the waves, my poor child, let me tell you."

"I dare say. I remember something about that. But tell me, Madame de Salvières, how do I come here under your roof?" He hesitated, bit his under lip, and fell silent, battling bravely with his hazy thoughts.

Tatiana, who wished herself a million miles away, replaced the half-empty glass upon the tray, and, stepping across to the nearest window, busied herself with a blind apparently recalcitrant—a strange happening in a dwelling where everything went always as neatly as clock-work.

Behind the stiff brocaded curtains falling straight on each side of his couch Preston was vainly trying to pull himself together. How was he here? What had become of Laurence after she had been torn from his arms in that hell of waters? Why was it the Duchess de Salvières—Prince Palitzin's sister—who nursed him, and, in the name of all wonders, why were her eyes so kind and sympathetic? Assuredly he deserved no such treatment from her.

"Madame de Salvières," he said at length, "would you very much mind coming here, since I cannot stir vet, and telling me something?"

Instantly Tatiana was at his side, her hand lightly touching his.

"I feel awfully foolish," he explained, "as foolish as a

MOONGLADE

man well can feel—and, to be truthful, I don't know where to begin, but I'd like to know what—what has happened to—to me, for instance?"

His fine eyes were searching hers imploringly, and, drawing a chair toward her with her foot, she sat down close to him without releasing her hold upon his cold fingers.

"You were a passenger on the *Wild Rose*," she began. "You remember that?"

"Yes."

"The yacht was caught in a storm and foundered a few cable-lengths from our rocks."

"Yes, I remember that, too; and then . . ."

"Oh! then," Tatiana resumed, "our life-savers did their duty, as they always do, and brought you ashore."

"But," Preston rebegan, fine beads of perspiration starting on his forehead, "I—I was not alone."

"Of course not. There were the captain, the officers, the crew, and my sister-in-law, your hostess."

"Yes, certainly."

"And now that you know all that is necessary for you to know at present, it will be best for you to go to sleep again, my dear Mr. Wynne. Later, when you are quite recovered, we will, if you wish it, discuss further."

She was surprised at the indifference of her tone. She might have been holding forth on the details of some approaching festivity, so natural did it sound.

"But," objected Preston, "I am not a bit sleepy, Madame de Salvières, and if it is not asking too much of you, would you—would you tell me—more?"

"What more can I tell you?" she said, trying desperately to keep on playing her impossible rôle. "Wrecks are wrecks, disagreeable moments to be gone through, of course, with casualties sometimes, and unpleasantness in any case. Some of the crew were drowned last night, as you may easily imagine, and we heard from the first mate

MOONGLADE

that you conducted yourself with extreme bravery, so all is for the best in this best of worlds."

"Drowned!" he exclaimed. "Drowned! It is not a very nice way to make one's exit. They were good fellows, those sailors of the *Wild Rose*. I am sorry. The captain?" he inquired, with a swift widening of the eyes. "Braines, I mean—Captain Braines—was he saved?"

"I am afraid not—at least he has not reappeared; but, really, you must listen to me now, and postpone the rest of the inquiry, Mr. Wynne. I cannot allow you to agitate yourself after the knocking about you had. I cannot, really!"

There was a hurried note in her words, a haste to finish that his swiftly awakening faculties did not miss; also he noticed, with that keenness of perception which sometimes follows a profound nervous shock, that the great gems on her fingers sparkled oddly, a quivering sparkle that denoted a tremor of hands held still by sheer will-power, and in a second his mind was made up.

"Madame de Salvières," he said, resolutely, "you are awfully kind to spare me, but I feel that there are things I ought to know—that, to express myself more clearly, I *deserve* to know. Give me a little more of that cordial and tell me all, *please!* I am not a child; I feel perfectly normal, I give you my honor, save for that queer numbness I told you of, and I ask you to be truly merciful and not to keep me in suspense."

Without a word Tatiana rose, reached for the restorative, and when this had been obediently swallowed to the last drop made him take a cup of cold, strong bouillon; then she sat down again.

"It would be absurd," she said, firmly, "to pretend not to understand you, Mr. Wynne. I would have preferred to wait a little longer before causing you more—" She stopped to choose an adequate word, and, finding none,

MOONGLADE

hastily put in "pain." "To cause you more pain than can be helped; but if you persist in wanting the truth, there is nothing left for me to do but to tell it to you brutally."

He did not stir even an eyelash; he was gazing at her in the glow of the setting sun, which left him in shadow and bathed her in a sort of glory which did not even make her wink, and he thought: "What a merciful and masterful face! This is indeed a woman to rely upon in time of need."

"Your affection for Laurence Palitzin—pardon me, but I cannot avoid alluding to that now—is very profound, I suppose. Of course you are a gentleman, and I am perfectly aware that you cannot speak of this feeling to any one, but you must yield one point and answer me this: Will it break your heart if the incident of last night and its—consequences oblige you to—part from her? Never to see her again, for instance?"

"You mean," Preston said, a slow flush rising to the roots of his hair, "will it cause me an insufferable sacrifice to give up—having brought this upon myself by my unforgivable imprudence and indiscretion—the friendship which Madame Palitzin was so kind as to honor me with?"

Tatiana, wondering at his delicacy and pluck, nodded. "Yes," she admitted, "that is precisely what I mean."

"Then I will answer in the negative, with all the frankness you impose upon me, madame. The affection and respect I feel for Madame Palitzin command me before all things to avoid—late in the day, alas!—compromising her by the merest hint of any deeper sentiment. May I assure you that from this day I will neither seek to see her, nor to communicate with her by spoken or written word? I have been guilty of unpardonable *légèreté* in accepting her invitation to cruise with her on the *Wild Rose*, but . . . friendship alone—" He had become a little

MOONGLADE

breathless, and, shaken with pity, Tatiana put her fingers on his lips in an impulsive, irresistible gesture, and drew them as swiftly away again.

"Enough," she said. "You are a very fine character, Mr. Wynne, permit me to say so." She had grown horribly pale, and her lips were twitching.

"But excuse me," he pleaded. "One word more. Should your brother—Prince Basil, I mean—consider that his wife's actions in accepting me as her guest, harmless as were her intentions, are—capable of misinterpretation by—by the public, I hold myself at his disposal, you understand. I am an American, and doubtless you have often heard, madame, that we do not look kindly upon dueling; but I think differently, and I'll give him satisfaction if he judges this to be his due."

Tatiana rose brusquely and stepped out of the sun-path piercing the room from end to end like a glittering sword-blade. To hear this poor cripple, this maimed boy, speak so gravely of giving Basil satisfaction was more than she could bear, and for the first time in her life the dauntless Tatiana felt herself within measurable distance of hysterics.

"My brother," she said at last, in a spiritless voice very foreign to her, "is—oh, a man every inch of him, not a brute, thank God!—and he will see as I do, that punishment more than adequate has been meted out. Let us say nothing further of all this."

She turned with her customary quickness, and he caught sight of her ashy face.

"Madame—Madame de Salvières!" he cried. "What is it? Has worse happened? Is she hurt? Is she . . .?"

His lips were trembling pitifully, and Tatiana rushed forward, threw her arms about him, and pressed his face against her breast as she would have done with Pavlo.

"Hush!" she murmured over him. "Hush! God knows

MOONGLADE

what He does. It is best for her like this—for you—for all of us."

Gently she knelt down, still holding him, and there was silence in the room. Far down below the cliffs the whistle of some sea-birds winging their way home cut the clear air that blew softly in at the windows, and Preston, who had never known a mother's caress, suddenly burst into a passion of tears.

"It is not as if you had loved her," she murmured, "as if it had been all your doing. You have many excuses. We cannot think altogether harshly of her—now, of course, but relationship does not exclude justice; and the blame is not all upon you, be assured of that."

He drew slightly away from her and stared at her in amazement.

"How—how do you know it?" he stammered.

"That is my secret, and will remain so," she consoled. "Suffice it that I do know, and—absolve you."

"I—I wish it were I," he whispered.

"Don't!" she implored, drying his eyes with her scrap of a handkerchief. "Don't say things like that. . . . You have paid enough already."

"Paid!" he scoffed through set teeth. "Paid, with a ducking and a few bruises? You call that paying?"

She was silent. What should she do? Tell him the whole truth while she was about it—give him the whole terrific dose at one draught? Would this be wiser, more merciful? Would one desperate shock counteract the other? All this raced across her mind while she smoothed the telltale flatness of the pillow, the uncrumpled sheet with its embroidered crest and crown. She was for energetic measures by nature, by conviction based upon a deep knowledge of life, but still she hesitated; and, quite carried beyond himself by her silence, he made a violent effort to sit up.

MOONGLADE

Just an instant too late she pressed him down with both her strong, tender hands on his shoulders. -

"Oh!" he said, faintly, understanding as in the revealing light of a lightning flash. "Oh! I have paid back a little, then? *Tant mieux!*" And this time he lay quite still, his struggle over.

CHAPTER XIX

One path there is, one only door
Of refuge from the blank Before,
And urge with reasons not a few
Regret and Gratitude thereto.

THE Castle of Salvières, with its gorgeous "presence flag" fluttering in the salt sea-breeze, basked in the brilliant sun of a hot afternoon. On the south terrace Piotr was rushing after a huge pink-and-green ball that Marguerite was untiringly throwing for him. Below, on the to-day unwrinkled surface of the little harbor, the *Sarcelle*, one of the finest steam-yachts afloat, was being spruced and polished and scraped and rubbed—like a steeple-chaser before a race—for her straight flight across the ocean. Even from that height the cheery lilt of a bo's'n's silver pipe could be distinctly heard as it blew its shrill commands, and the almond-white decks shone bravely after their last holystoning.

"Where's she going?" Master Piotr asked, running up with the gaily painted globe in his arms. "Garrassime and I were down there this morning, little darling Malou, and the steward said that Uncle Jean had ordered her to be ready by to-morrow. Is she going to England?"

"I don't know," Marguerite quite truthfully answered, for ever since the wreck she had asked no questions, dreading to probe into a situation which she realized was quite beyond her.

"Ho, ho!" cried Piotr, spying a tall, black-robed figure

MOONGLADE

emerging from the Louis XI. wing by a postern-door all overrun with creepers. "Where have you been, Uncle Pierre? You're always fussing on that side of the quadrangle. Have you a surprise hidden there for me?"

The Abbé de Kerdren received the flushed, laughing boy full against his long legs without a reproof; then bending, he lifted him to his left arm.

"You are always so unexpected, Piotr," he remarked. "Your rubber ball would be no worse as far as bounce is concerned, but decidedly lighter."

"You haven't answered my question, Uncle Pierre?" grumbled Piotr, snatching at the abbé's long sash as if it had been a bell-rope. "Answer me, please!"

"Indeed, Majesty! Well, as you have condescended to say 'please,' I will confide to you that there is not the least bit of a surprise in store for you, neither in the *Louis-Onze* wing nor anywhere else."

"*Tfoul!*" came from Piotr in an admirable imitation of the *mujik's* favorite expression of disapproval. "*Tfoul!* I don't think you're telling the truth, Uncle Pierre, because I know there's going to be a surprise pretty soon."

"You're not very polite, my Muscovite friend. And, by the way, what makes you think that there will be a surprise, after all? You seem pretty sure about it!"

Marguerite had drawn near and had swung herself to the parapet of the terrace, from which she dangled her little feet half a yard from the ground. She was barely listening, but still she heard, and Piotr's next remark caused her to suddenly catch hold of the stonework on both sides as if in need of steadying herself.

"Papa is the surprise," piped the boy, glancing triumphantly up in the abbé's face. "He is coming here—right here—to Salvières in a day or two."

The priest's expectant smile was wiped out as with a cloth, and it was in a tone of strangely disproportionate

MOONGLADE

reproof that he replied, "What silly yarn is this, and who told you such a fib, to begin with?"

Piotr, greatly offended, drew up his sturdy little body. "I don't know," he replied, in his peculiarly precocious fashion, "why everybody tells me I'm a liar. Garrassime is just like you; he said that I wasn't saying the truth."

"Garrassime is a man of great sense, then, that's all," the abbé said, with some heat, stealing a glance in the direction of Marguerite, who, bent forward, her lips a little unclosed, her blue eyes wide, was as motionless as the broad balustrade on which she sat.

"If your father were coming here, assuredly Garrassime would know about it. So you see that you are dreaming, or have been misinformed, my dear child," the abbé resumed.

"Mis-in-formed!" sulked Piotr. "What does that mean? Is it that I've been lied to?"

"Dear me," said the exasperated Abbé de Kerdren, "can't you remember, Piotr, that the words 'lie' and 'liar' are not parliamentary—no, I don't express myself right—not polite or well-bred, d'you understand?"

"Oh, I don't mind that, but if one's got to be polite now, even during play-hours, it's beastly!"

"Piotr!" threatened the abbé.

But Piotr was not listening, and, following his own idea, burst out, "I know Papa is coming and so does Aunt Tatiana; so there!"

"Is it Aunt Tatiana who has told you so?"

"No, Uncle Pierre, she did not tell it to me; she was talking to Uncle Jean after he kissed her."

"Where?"

"Where? Why, behind the ear, just on that little soft, white place one has above the neck."

"But, *sapristi!* I am not asking you where your uncle Jean kissed her. I ask where they both were when you heard what you pretend they said."

MOONGLADE

"That's different," condescended Piotr, with immense dignity. "They were in Aunt Tatiana's dressing-room. I was under the dressing-table that's got petticoats of gauze and an underskirt of pink satin. They say it's a Duchess table, so I think that's why Aunt Tatiana's got one."

"But in the name of all the Saints of Paradise what were you doing under the dressing-table, and what did you hear, or rather mis-hear?"

"I was hiding a mouse from the stable to frighten Marie when she found it." And, seeing the abbé's eyes seek Heaven in silent protest, Piotr continued: "You're going to say it was not chivalrous like Bayard or the old Du Guesclin little darling Malou's so fond of, but Marie's such a coward and I wanted to hear her cry: '*Oh! M'ame la Duchesse—une souris! L'affreuse bête! Elle va me mordre!*'"

"Now look here, Piotr," the abbé said with enforced resignation, "let Marie and the mouse be for a minute, and admit that you did not hear a word of what you think you heard."

"But I did hear, Uncle Pierre, I did! I did! I did! Aunt Tatiana had been crying—at least I think she must have been, because her eyes looked bright as my blue marbles, and Uncle Jean said to her in Russian, 'Don't be silly, *doushka*,' and then he kissed her; and she rubbed her nose on his coat and said, 'It's dreadful, Jeannot. If Basil arrives now, what shall we do?' and then Uncle Jean said, 'He can't arrive before forty-eight hours, and by that time the *Sarcelle* will be far out to sea!' and then he dragged her to the balcony to make her look down at the yacht, and I ran away on all-fours so they couldn't see me, and I went quick to Garrassime, who was awful angry with me for telling him. Now give me a ride on your shoulder, Uncle Pierre, all around the quadrangle, to reward me for telling you."

MOONGLADE

"I'll be hanged if I do!" was on the abbé's lips, but Piotr was to be conciliated just then, and so he said instead: "I will give you a ride, but on condition that you promise to forget all this nonsense. Promise, Piotr, solemnly, that you will not say another word about it to any one. You misunderstood the whole thing, I assure you."

Piotr shook his head twice from side to side. He was beginning to think that perhaps, after all, he had been mistaken, and yet not quite; but a ride on his uncle's broad shoulder was tempting, so he suddenly held out his square little paw. "*Tope-là!*" he gravely proposed. "I'll not speak to anybody about Papa's coming, Uncle Pierre; but I can't help knowing that he's coming."

"Good Lord!" murmured the abbé under his breath, "there's stubbornness for you!" and, picking up the delighted child, he started on his equine course at a brisk amble, his soutane blown by the wind against his splendid form, his sash flying behind him in the gayest way possible, although his heart felt sore indeed.

Marguerite descended from her high perch, not at a jump as she was wont to do, but very wearily. She felt tired—something new to her—and very sad; but her brave eyes were clouded by no tears, and her lips were absolutely steady. Her lesson in self-repression had been learned long ago; besides, not one thought of her own future, after the tragedy that had changed everything, had as yet entered her head, which she held just as straight as ever.

Tatiana had marveled at the "Gamin's" tact and courage—this motherless little creature, whose high-bred self-respect and extreme delicacy of feeling were sufficient to make her avoid the slightest *faux-pas* in speech or look under crushing difficulties. Even to Tatiana she had not said a word that could betray the least curiosity. She had not alluded to the extraordinary presence of Preston

MOONGLADE

Wynne on Laurence's yacht, and had indeed hardly alluded to the catastrophe at all. But now, as she walked slowly along the parapet, she wondered within herself whether it was really true that Basil was on his way to Salvières. Something told her that Piotr had spoken sooth, and the abbé's evident desire to nip the story, so to speak, in the bud, gave her much food for reflection, in spite of her ignorance of what had happened before.

In a few minutes Piotr came back to her, leaving the abbé to return to his affairs, and the game of ball was resumed. The boy was dressed in white without any trace of mourning, and (by Tatiana's express advice) so was Marguerite herself, for word had been passed that Piotr was not to be told about his loss, and the servants at Salvières were far too loyal to let a sign escape them that might betray the truth.

The predicament of Tatiana and her husband was really a trying one, for until Preston's departure they dreaded the possible arrival of Basil, which might occur at any moment. She had continued to look after Preston Wynne devotedly, and her unremitting care touched him to the heart.

"You will be absolutely comfortable on the *Sarcelle*," she said to him that evening. "Jean has had the main saloon arranged so that it will be, at one and the same time, a sleeping and living apartment for you—a library it always is, more or less, well provided with bewilderingly mixed-up literature: funny, serious, instructive, scientific, beatific, and sportive, *un peu pour tous les goûts*. And, by the way, how do you like your two attendants, the orderly and the *carabin*?"

Preston, lying motionless upon his bed, turned toward her eyes brimming over with gratitude.

"Your kindness to me, Madame de Salvières, has been something well-nigh incredible. A lifetime of real long length would hardly be enough to prove to you how pro-

MOONGLADE

foundly touched I am by it—but,” he murmured beneath his breath, “there will be no long life to do it in.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” she said, quickly. “It does not look like you to despair.”

“I know,” he replied, smiling dubiously, “but what I just said is no sign of despair. Indeed, to linger for years as a totally useless lump, a burden to everybody, would require much more courage than to take a polite and immediate leave of this world. Besides, there is another bitterness added to the rest—I hardly like to speak of that, but you have spoiled me to the extent of making me look upon you as a confessor of all my thoughts.”

“Oh, go on then. What is it?”

“Well,” he hesitated, “I have been turning over facts in my mind pretty assiduously, believe me, during the last few days, and one of them is that I am a cripple unable to repair in any way the harm I have done. No, please don’t say anything! I thoroughly realize that the memory of—of Madame Palitzin—will be for ever shadowed by the manner of—in short, by what preceded the accident. Too many know that I was on board the *Wild Rose*; it will leak out sooner or later that ‘Mr. Harrington,’ the private secretary, was Preston Wynne, and now that it has become a physical impossibility for me to give satisfaction to Prince Palitzin, the stain is and will remain indelible.”

“My dear, good boy,” Tatiana recriminated, “this is sheer morbidity. First of all, who are the many who, according to you, know that ‘Mr. Harrington’ was not ‘Mr. Harrington’? Jean and myself and the Abbé de Kerdren, Régis, old Garrassime, and possibly Marguerite de Plenhœl, although she has not mentioned your name or your presence to a living soul; but, of course, she saw you as you were being carried ashore. None will speak, rest assured; so think no more about it and remember that while there is life there is hope; that you are young,

MOONGLADE

intelligent, gifted, and, moreover, extremely wealthy, since you have inherited during the past four years not only your father's colossal fortune, but also your grandmother's. This gives you immense opportunities to do good; to create interests of many sorts for yourself that will occupy your mind. I am not trying to overdose you with rose-colored views of a painful situation, but still—" She paused and finished her discourse by a very convincing little gesture.

"Yes; I dare say you are right," Preston admitted; "but my money without me would do just as much good, provided I managed to pass it on to somebody who would take the trouble off my hands. Personally I am not a philanthrope, I am afraid."

"Neither am I," she retorted. "Organized charities are a horror to me. Don't misunderstand what I say. I certainly admit that money left to hospitals, orphan-asylums, *crèches*, etc., etc., is well employed; but it has always seemed to me that one gold piece given to the truly deserving, from hand to hand, as by one human being to another, so to speak, is far better than inscribing one's name—almost invariably with the hope of its being published abroad—upon a list of so-called philanthropies."

"I am entirely of your opinion, excepting that in order to discover the truly deserving it is needful to be up, about, and doing."

"Not with a fitting and faithful agent."

"A faithful and fitting representative? Yes . . . perhaps!"

"How many millions have you got?" she asked, laughingly, to cheer him up.

"Oh," he said, immediately catching the spirit of her mood, "let me see—about fifty—that is in dollars, you understand."

"Two hundred and fifty millions of francs! Good Lord! That's a pleasing sum!"

MOONGLADE

"It might have been," he argued. "But now . . ."

"I beg your pardon, it's just exactly now that they'll come in handy. Think of it! First of all, a big steam-yacht, . . . they're not cheap toys. A special private car . . ."

"But I have those already," he mourned. "I became heir to my father's whole outfit, lock, stock, and barrel. There's not a thing to look forward to any more!"

"Dear, dear! What it is to be pampered." She rose and, bending over him, smoothed his hard little apology for a pillow. "I must go and dress for dinner," she explained. "I wish I didn't have to leave you here alone."

He pressed his lips to her hand as it flitted beside his head. "You have been so good to me, so very, very good," he said, with emotion, "I hate to think I am leaving you to-morrow, never to see you again."

"And why that, pray?" she demanded.

"Because," he said—"because there seems to me no possibility, even with 'my big yacht,' to come once more and darken your doors with the memories I would unavoidably suggest."

"I don't agree with you at all," she asserted; "but we will come back to this to-morrow morning. Now go to sleep as soon as you can, like a good child. *Buenas noches!*"

"*Felices sueños!*" he murmured, raising his eyes wistfully. "You," he added, "seem determined to heap coals of scriptural fire upon undeserving heads. Do you always return good for evil?"

"Evil!" she mused aloud. "Good for evil? Granting that this be my habit, it would merely be a selfish one, for if one returns evil for evil and bite for bite, one is cheated. There is nothing more then for Almighty God to do; it is much better to remain His creditor."

"That's a new view of the case," he pondered, and then, in an altered tone, suddenly added: "Madame de Sal-

MOONGLADE

vières, you have always done so much for me, will you—will you kiss me good night?”

“Why, yes, of course I will,” she assented, and, bending once more over him, she kissed him on the forehead. “*Voilà, mon enfant,*” she said, pushing back his hair; and he watched her white dress disappear in the penumbra of the immense room.

Left alone, he gave a long, shuddering sigh, and for a moment closed his eyes very tight. When he opened them again he let them wander about the room, with its splendid tapestries, its admirably preserved antique furniture, its deep window embayments filled by transparent shadows, that revealed here the dull gold of a frame, there the bevel of a looking-glass, the pale gleam of ivory, the deeper darkness of bronze, and the groups of flowering plants Tatiana had caused to be brought there for the pleasure of his gaze. Close beside him on a very low table, which he could easily reach without moving more than his arm, stood a great bunch of violets in a bowl of Venetian glass; there was also there a block-note provided with paper and envelopes, a fountain-pen, a silver tray upon which rested a decanter of Muscat de Frontignan, a box of cigarettes, a match-safe, and a glass, and on the other edge two or three little medicine-bottles and a crystal spoon.

He could hear the *carabin*—as the Duchess had designated him—walking softly up and down in the adjoining salon, waiting to be summoned, but he did not do this. Instead he noiselessly drew paper and pen toward him, and a little awkwardly began to write, holding the pad almost upright before his eyes, for to be quite flat on one’s back is inconvenient for such business. Sheet after sheet he covered with shaky but very legible writing, quite aware that twice the medical student, and twice the orderly, had peeped in at the door to see how he was doing. A little smile raised the corners of his lips, but he took no

MOONGLADE

further notice and went on writing quietly. At last he had done, and, folding the scattered pages, he slipped them into an envelope together with a few violets from the fragrant cluster Tatiana herself had brought to him an hour or so before; gummed the flap down, wrote the address, "*Madame la Duchesse de Salvières, Personnelle,*" and slid the packet into the breast pocket of his pajama jacket. Then he called the budding doctor.

"*Mon cher ami,*" he said, "before braving again the perils of the sea—which will be to-morrow if all goes well—I wish to make some temporary disposal of my property, or properties, rather, for, alas! they are numerous. I suppose that according to French law a brief document of the kind I am thinking of, witnessed by you and, for instance, your assistant, would be quite valid?"

"Why, yes, monsieur, certainly. It is what they call a holograph will, but I am very sorry to see that you are feeling anxious. There is no danger, I assure you, in crossing the ocean in such a ship as Monsieur le Duc de Salvières's yacht; and as to your health, why, there is no doubt that you will improve with every day."

Preston laughed. "I am not in the least anxious, I swear to you," he said, lightly. "Of course my general health will be improved by the sea trip before us—though it will have, as you know, no effect whatever upon the lesion that has—shall we say preoccupied us all?"

The youthful doctor looked embarrassed and felt himself color, much to his disgust. "Oh, that naturally is another question, monsieur. Still, you have great strength, great energy; the vital organs are all in wonderful condition."

"Don't be professional! Please! Please!" smiled Preston. "Be legal, however, if you don't mind, for a few moments, and satisfy my mind before I seek oblivion in sleep. Here, give me that block-note and the pen; I'll just scribble what I want."

MOONGLADE

With a tolerant little glance at his patient's face the young man complied, and accepted a cigarette, which he smoked with exceeding relish while the work was in progress.

"There we are!" Preston said, triumphantly, after a while. "Bravo! the *magistrature*, as you call it here—or is it the *barreau*?—has lost a great luminary in my humble person. Read my *chef-d'œuvre*, my friend, and tell me what you think of it. You observe that I have made it out both in French and in English. Hum! Wasn't that smart of me?"

"It's always best to humor patients," the other reflected, remembering the teachings of more than one grim instructor, and he took the wide-open page, over which he scarcely glanced. What did it matter to him?

"It seems very legal," he smiled, good-naturedly. "Do you really wish my signature and Olivier's to this?" (Olivier was the orderly's gracious cognomen.)

"Course I do; otherwise why should I have given myself such elaborate pains? The caligraphy may leave a little to be desired, but what will you? *À la guerre comme à la guerre!*"

The deed accomplished with no solemnity at all, Preston closed the second envelope and joined it to the first in his pocket.

"If you don't mind," he said, pleasantly, "I should like to read for half an hour or so before composing myself to slumber. Will you be so good as to hand me that most interesting volume of short stories there on the chair?"

The interne readily complied. He wanted to write a few words to his mother before retiring, and so he quickly returned to the salon.

Slowly, and with some difficulty, Preston drew the upper part of his body inch by inch to the very edge of the bed, made a long arm, and managed noiselessly to

MOONGLADE

reach a bottle adorned with a crimson label. Steadily, deliberately, laboriously, he took the tumbler from the tray, half-filled it with wine from the decanter, poured in the whole contents of the medicine-bottle—slanting the glass so as to avoid any sound—replaced everything in order, and swallowed the dose in two deep draughts. Then he lay back on his pillow, and, strange to say, this non-Catholic made the sign of the cross.

* * * * *
* * * * *

“Madame la Duchesse! Madame la Duchesse!”

The strangled tones of the medical student made Tatiana, who was leaning over the balcony of her room looking at the crescent moon, start with a sudden uncontrollable dread.

“What is it?” she cried in a shaking voice.

“Come down, come down, quick!”

Her hair already unbound for the night and falling below her knees, her peignoir fluttering like wings behind her, Tatiana joined him on the terrace.

“My God,” she whispered, “you look like a ghost!”

The young man tried to speak, gulped, tried again, and failed. He was shaking like a leaf as he pointed to the lighted windows of Preston’s room.

She needed now no explanation, and her little feet in their velvet mules covered the ground from one entrance to the other as fast as Marguerite’s could have done.

In the room all was as still and orderly as when she had last left it; on the bed lay Preston . . . asleep? No! One look was enough, and, rushing forward, she pushed out of her way the Salvières doctor, who stood white-faced and helpless between her and the quiet form.

“Have you tried everything?” she asked, tremulously, her hand on the still heart, her lips twitching.

“Yes, everything—so heavy a dose of chloral paralyzes

MOONGLADE

the heart quickly—and when the doctor there called me it was already all over.”

Tatiana swayed a little. “Chloral!” she said, dully. “Chloral—left near him! And I never thought of that, miserable fool that I am!”

“Who could have thought of it, Madame la Duchesse, cheerful as he was?”

“We should have thought!” She stooped over Preston and hopelessly put her ear to his heart, her fingers on his pulse. A rustle of paper made her straighten herself abruptly, and then she sat down all of a piece on the edge of the bed close to him and tore open the envelope addressed to her.

Her fingers were shaking so, her eyes were so hazy, that at first she could not see, and with the gesture of a sorrowing child she passed the back of her hand across her face. “I must! I must!” she murmured, and slowly she unfolded the little leaves.

“Another burden yet will I impose upon you,” she read, “that of keeping me near you in consecrated ground—for you will see to that, will you not? since from you I have learned so much.”

She paused; two large tears glided down her cheeks; then she went on bravely to the end. “I leave all I have to leave to the Abbé de Kerdren for the poor; all excepting a sum sufficient to make him whom you called my *carabin* independent for life. He has, I understand, a mother to support. You will approve, I know. Also you will think gently of me and pray for me—I do not doubt that. God bless and reward you.”

The three men in the room, with heads lowered, hardly dared to breathe.

“Olivier,” the Duchess said at last, very low, “go and fetch the Duke.” And she knelt down beside Preston.

CHAPTER XX

Though you may claim with seeming sense
That Ignorance is not Innocence,
And that it doth her worth enhance
Whose Innocence is not Ignorance;
In either case, recall to mind,
Unstainedness is hard to find,
And when the childish kind is rare
The other lives not anywhere.

THE harvest had ripened and been cut in the fields, and rich red apples were glowing like ambitious rubies in every orchard of the fair valley of Salvières, where the sun brought forth all the beauty of variegated foliage—fawn, and scarlet, and amaranth, and pure gold.

It was early morning as yet, and tiny pink fleeces of cloud still lingered in the east, infinite and subtle against the deepening blue of the sky. The little river flowed rapidly between its screens of bushes and tall reeds, and the grass in the shadow of hedge and tree, not quite dry of night-dews, held a million liquid gems of iridescent tints that seemed to sparkle the more for the gentle thunder of the water, scurrying over great mossy rocks on its way to the sea.

Thatched roofs nestled beneath the heathery heights inclosing the valley on both sides—heights crowned with serried regiments of firs—and on the Castle side lawns of emerald green ran headlong down the steep descent to the limits of the home park and its splendid gates of forged iron. The park was a spot well suited to reveries and day-

MOONGLADE

dreams; a concert-place for nightingales where the grassy alleys were chequered by light and shade in almost equal measure, as a rule, but now the deep-diapered shadows were still heavy. It was a faultless morning, indeed, and so thought the "Gamin" as she stood for a moment leaning against the scaly bark of a Himalayan cedar, gazing downward to the pearl-and-silver haze that hung gauzily over the river. A flock of sanctimonious rooks circled overhead, cawing their raucous warning, while blackbirds flitting to and fro under the branches sent from their yellow beaks a constant melodious whistle, whose bourdon was furnished by squadrons of bees mumbling all together as they worked from clump to clump of wild autumnal flowers: "*We're working—working—working—we're working—working against—the winter; we're working—working—well!*"

The "Gamin" did not move, thinking her white thoughts there undisturbed. She wore a soft dress of dove-gray, one half-blown snowy rose with a heart of gold in her belt, and beneath her wide-winged garden hat her crinkled hair was golden, too, but of a paler shade.

"Oh, what—what—will happen next?" The question repeated and repeated itself rhythmically in her mind. She had so often of late proposed it to herself. In her blue eyes prayer, doubt, anxiety, and hope shone together in puzzled complexity. She looked very lovely, and if she seemed several tints less merry than she had been, a thought more pensive than of yore, nobody could like her any the less for that. A true young girl's inner mind is so graciously mysterious, teeming with so many delicate fancies all its own, and such strange and delicious dreams throng there, that no man worthy the name would be bold enough to so much as try and probe them.

She took a few steps on the thick moss over-glazed by fragrant cedar needles and fell again to admiring the play of the sunbeams on the velvet slope that dropped

MOONGLADE

away from her little feet. Behind her the duskiness of the park, crossed and recrossed by flights of furtive wings, slept undisturbed; and, suddenly attracted by a wondrous-fat beetle of bronzed corselet and lance-like antennæ, she knelt on the elastic brown of the moss to watch his busy, fussy course the closer. Soon she discovered that another beetle a trifle more gracile in make, less adult in appearance, more green of armor, and far more brilliant, was scurrying up from the opposite side, horns in rest—as it were—a bellicose glint on the bulging surface of its beady eyes. “They’re going to fight,” she whispered, and glanced swiftly around to find the cause of this warlike humor. Ah, yes! there it was, not far away under the shelter of a foxglove-leaf—a beautiful lady-beetle flying the dazzling colors of a cantharide rose-bug all ashimmer with metallic splendor.

So absorbed was she in the impending combat that she failed to hear a step coming along the sanded path four yards away. It came quickly, determinately, but a few paces from where she still knelt it halted abruptly, and for a breathing-space the melodious silence of the wooded solitude trembled anew in the balance. The beetles were advancing threateningly toward each other; the fun would soon grow fast and furious. The “Gamin” bent closer, a smile of amusement parting her lips, and then the tiny crackle of a branch made her turn and look.

“Basil!” she cried. “Basil!” There was such surprised delight and at the same time such tender sympathy in the exclamation, that Marguerite’s instinct alone could have blended it so well.

“Yes, it’s I,” he said, stating a patent fact in the rather dull way he used at times of embarrassment, without moving an inch toward her; then he came forward, hand outstretched, with a “How are you, Marguerite?” that fell cold and over-indifferent on the mellowness of the air.

Her small fingers resting for a second or so in his, she

MOONGLADE

answered, "Very well. And you?" in the tone of one meeting a casual acquaintance after a few hours' separation; but then she could not repress a nervous little laugh, for which she could instantly have beaten herself with rods.

"How do you come to be out so early?" he said, conversationally, his heart strumming against his side.

"And how did you enter the park?" she countered in unconscious retaliation.

"By the village gate. I came from the station in a most egregious *cariole* drawn by a magnificent Anglo-Norman, of course, and driven by a blue-bloused, cotton-bonneted native, who charged me one hundred *sols-Paris* for the job, and whom I dismissed with something additional at the said gate."

"But," she argued, white now as the white rose at her waist—"but why didn't you telegraph for a carriage—announce your arrival?"

"I thought of it, but decided that it was more in my line to sneak in like a thief in the morning. . . . That is misquoted, I believe."

She was searching his dear face despairingly for information as to his true state of feeling. He was talking against time, she knew well enough, but what was there lurking behind that calm, almost apathetic expression? Had he heard about Laurence—about the wreck? Did he know already that the beautiful woman who had borne his name none too well was silently awaiting his return in a triple envelope of palisander and silver and lead, to be carried far away where all past Princesses Palitzin had been laid in state for many generations? And Piotr, wasn't he going even to mention Piotr—Tatiana, or Jean? Her sweet countenance, like the valley below, was caught in a maze of swiftly lightening and darkening impressions, sunshine and shadow, doubt and fear, and again hope conquering them all; but he remained immovable to the

MOONGLADE

verge of stupidity, aware, though, and fully, that she was suffering and—God!—that he too suffered, suffered unbearably—as, had she been quicker, she would have noticed by the almost imperceptible quiver of his under lip.

“Shall we move on?” he asked at length, shaking his shoulders ever so slightly.

She nodded the big, soft wings of her hat, her face hidden now, and stepped into the path five inches ahead of him. The belligerent beetles, scared by the voices, had prudently subdued their foaming wrath and postponed their jealous combat.

As they walked off Marguerite was mechanically counting the great men whom history has made famous for their inclination toward dullness—the heroes of romance likewise indicated—Porthos and Athos—and Charlemagne—and Barbarossa—and Ferdinand II. of Austria—and Bayard himself, despite all the glamour of his faith, his courage, and his purity. The monk Abélard (who—but she did not know that—had his excuses, of course), Wilfred of Ivanhoe, and many, many others, lovable, admirable, classic—and classified according to their merits. She stole a glance toward the splendid man striding beside her, and wondered why marriage, even unhappy marriage, had wrought such a change in him. He had never been lively even in the past, but since that memorable day when Laurence had appeared on the scene at Plenhœl he had appeared to be another being, triumphant and frozen, glorified and stupefied in turn; at first too visibly happy to be taken seriously, afterward sliding gradually into a half-tinted mood that lost him all power to show himself as he really was. And now had he really any heart left? she asked herself in amaze. His outward appearance was reassuring. He looked, as a matter of fact, younger than he had when she had last seen him—his forehead quite smooth, his finely cut features a hint more masterful than ever, his eyes clear and direct, and there was just a touch

MOONGLADE

of haughtiness in his bearing she had not yet seen there, as though he were challenging the universe to come and pity him.

"Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed!" rang, she fancied, in the very sound of his foot on the gravel. A foot of admirable shape and comparative narrowness, although a bit heroic—*ex-pede-Herculem!*

Everything has an end—*nur die Wurst hat zwei* (as our graceful friends the Germans have a knack of putting it)—and that charming long walk round to the Castle inclosure, machicolated and betowered and bekeept, came at last to its conclusion. Not another word had been spoken. At the base of the turret where Basil had always had his rooms the couple came to a stand. It was a very proud, historic turret, coiffed with a pointed octagonal slate *poivrière* agreeably topped by a gray vane, and entered by one of those mullioned pointed doorways that are the delight of artists, with their intricate sculpturings, dainty *rainceaux* and wonderful stone tendrils engarlanding the royal *fleur-de-lys*.

"Now, *please*," said Basil—"please don't awaken any one for me, Marguerite. I'd sooner be alone at first, just for a little while at least."

"Can't I call Garrassime?" she pleaded, prettily, her mouth drooping at the corners in a tiny *moue* that made him pull himself together with a mental jerk.

"Ah, yes! to be sure, Garrassime is here," he remarked; "but I would rather you didn't call him. I am used to shifting for myself now whenever it's necessary; often I prefer it, even."

His hand was on the etched and graven latch, the primeval and archaic *loquet* of the door, that was still thought sufficient to guard the treasures within when the family was there. The banner flapping in the eternal sea-breeze above the keep was guard enough for all purposes then.

MOONGLADE

"As you will," said the "Gamin." "*Et que dieu vous protège, mon cousin!*" and she turned and went her way.

From the greater portion of the days that followed, and from all the conferences *à deux, à trois, et à quatre* which took up so many hours, Marguerite naturally was absent. She had known it would be thus, and was resigned beforehand to her isolation, but what she had not counted upon was the sudden removal of Piotr and Garrassime to far-off Plenhœl without the boy having seen his father. Why they hadn't sent her off also she could not imagine, for what use was she, excepting at meal-times, when she was expected to fill her place as usual?

She missed Piotr very much. Basil she hardly saw. Tatiana and Jean and her own father had evidently never been so busy in their lives. Poor "Antinoüs" had said to her: "It's a bad moment to pass, *mon Chevalier*. Keep a stiff upper lip! Basil is going to convey his—er—relic to Russia. *Noblesse-oblige* you know—and then you and I, my precious, will take flight too and rebegin our good little comfortable life once more."

"But what of Piotr?" she had asked. "Can't we keep him with us, Papa? I cannot imagine why Basil appears to push him purposely out of his way. The de Salvières have their own cares, their own duties and interests, but we, Papa, in our *ménage de vieux garçons* have nothing but our two selfish selves to think of. Can't we keep him, Papa, until Basil awakes? Can't we really, *please, please!*"

She had put up her hands like good Sir Hugh Calverley of Froissart fame, and had looked so much more effective, or rather affecting, than that dauntless knight could ever have done, that Régis had inwardly surrendered—he was so sorry for his *Chevalier*—although outwardly he had pooh-poohed the proposal.

Now, as the period of discussion drew to a close, Marguerite began to feel the influence of a factor she had hitherto ignored absolutely—namely, the presence of those

MOONGLADE

torturers called nerves, the gain and livelihood of sapient specialists the world over, who grope among them, fumbling with forces of which they are as truly ignorant as are the greatest physicists of the real potency or impotency of electricity. Her whole being was stretched on the rack of incertitude, of ceaseless questionings of the future; and this is a bad state of affairs. "What is going to happen next?" The wind waltzing along the cliffs sang it to its own gyrations, the great trees of the park, courtesying and bowing to a passing squall, echoed it; the very rustle of her silk and batiste pillow in the depth of the night murmured it slyly in her ear as she settled herself to try and sleep.

One afternoon she had ridden off immediately after the second breakfast, followed by Ireland—who invariably accompanied her as the most important unit of her personal household when she visited anywhere—and was cantering toward the chestnut-woods belonging to Salvières. She was on the thoroughbred English horse that was Pavlo's special property, a savage-tempered hunter of tender years who had from the first made up his mind to struggle and resist on any and every pretext, whether reasonable or not. He answered—or refused to answer oftener than often—to the mild and misleading cognomen of "Narses"—a name he had no sort of right to, being a fire-eating stallion beautiful beyond compare.

"Narses" was mincing his steps like a dancing-master, his dainty, almost transparent ears erect, but quite demurely so—a trick he had when bent on special mischief—but his rider knew that and was ready for him, which robbed the equine pleasantry of half of its value. At the turning of one broad, shady *allée* into another "Narses" suddenly "swapped ends" with a violence that would have unseated any less supple *equestrienne* than the "Gamin"; then began a series of snorts, not to say grunts, testifying to the utmost terror. Marguerite laughed, stretched her-

MOONGLADE

self forward, and presented the culprit with a flat-handed box on the side of the neck, which he scarcely felt, excepting in his innermost soul, but he stopped his gruntings; and, strangely enough, suffered himself to be brought face to face with an intimate stable companion mounted by Basil. She had a way with horses, had Marguerite.

The *rencontre*, unpremeditated by her at least, was not unwelcome, and she smiled up at her kinsman in her old merry way.

"You should not ride that brute!" was his gracious form of greeting, and its masterfulness made her laugh again. "I beg your pardon," apologized Basil, "but really 'Narses' is not a woman's hack, and I think Régis must be demented if he allows you to do it."

"And why, pray?" she asked, curtly. "I ride always whatever I please. Besides, 'Narses' is not wicked; he is merely playful."

"Playful, eh? Well, since you are here we might try and gallop to take his playfulness out of him. 'The Cid' will steady and chasten him after a fashion, I hope."

"All right," she consented, ranging alongside, and with Ireland fifty hoof-beats behind, they proceeded toward the head-waters of the river.

Basil looked more at ease, less absorbed, and altogether more human, as she expressed it to herself. The saddle was his natural place—that was where he was at his best, at any rate; and when they came to the first check in their gallop much ice had fallen to pieces between them.

"You ride marvelously," he conceded, with that air of studiously avoiding a compliment which had the gift of making her rear mentally up on end, it was so obviously forced.

"My grateful thanks to you, good sir," she said. "I salute you," and with a quick, roguish gesture she gravely raised her straw hat and suited the action to the words.

MOONGLADE

"Good Lord!" came from Basil. "Don't you wear any pins to hold that thing on?"

"Not being, so far, entirely deprived of hair," she replied, "pins would be a pure nuisance."

"Deprived of hair!" he could not help exclaiming. "I should think not; but what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything! Can't you see that when it's all tightly piled atop of my head, a well-made sailor-hat just fits over it? Its crown, filled to the edges, can't stir; it isn't like a modern crown, you see, which is a comfort."

Basil did not laugh outright, but he looked as if he were very near doing so, and this, too, was by way of being a comfort to the rider of "Narses."

They were now following a narrower path on the summit of a low hill, away inland, and, having slackened speed to let their horses breathe, it was difficult to avoid a chat.

"I am leaving to-morrow," began Basil, with that startling lack of the most ordinary tact which is displayed by men of his stamp under certain conditions.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I did not expect to stay so long, but circumstances—"

"Over which you had no control," finished the "Gamin," calmly.

"What did you say?" he asked, turning to look at her with a sudden suspicion that she was laughing at him.

"I said, circumstances over which you had no control—that's the accepted formula, isn't it?" she retorted.

Basil rode in silence for a full two minutes, then began again, stiffly: "As I am leaving Normandy to-morrow—"

"When you discover a subject of conversation you push it to its furthest possibilities," Marguerite interrupted. "Well, it is gradually dawning on me that you really intend to leave Normandy, Salvières, and the be-

MOONGLADE

neighboring regions to-morrow, although wiseacres pretend that to-morrow does not exist."

This unwonted flippancy caught Basil on the raw, and his teeth closed so grimly that the muscles became vaguely apparent beneath the tan of his lean cheeks; a signal his tyro-tormentor perceived clearly, and was exasperated enough to appreciate profoundly.

"If you will deign to grant me your attention for a few short moments, I will explain why I make a point of bringing this inconsiderable event to your notice."

"Imbecile!" flashed through Marguerite's mind amid a flood of remorse for such a desecration. "I grant you my attention," she, however, persevered, and Basil viciously bit one end of his mustache, which he had drawn into his mouth.

"I will be gone for a wholly indeterminate period of time," he pursued. "Years, probably."

With extreme aptness "Narses" shied at a rabbit frolicking in the lush grass, and indulged in a series of risky gambades that afforded Marguerite an opportunity of strictly attending to his misdeeds.

"A dangerous horse! Didn't I say so? Why, you are quite pale!" scolded Basil, with astounding finesse, as for the second time "Narses" was forced back to his post. "But you manage him very cleverly," he added. "As I was saying, I will be absent long."

Marguerite probably did not judge it worth her while to comment upon this reiteration, and Basil, looking straight before him, went on:

"I want to ask you whether you were serious when you spoke to your father about keeping my—I mean Piotr—with you for a while."

"I endeavor to be always serious when dealing with family questions, *mon cousin*," she replied.

"Of course it is a sacrifice on your part, and it will be a—what shall I say?—an intolerable nuisance for

MOONGLADE

Régis; but there's no accounting for both your generosities."

Marguerite, flicking a tiny bramble from her habit, shrugged her shoulders.

"Suppose you abandon these eloquent sentences for the time being?" she proposed. "There's nobody under the furniture—the bushes, I mean—and if it is for me alone that you are going to such oratorical expense, I will excuse plain and unadorned speech."

"What ails her?" thought Basil. "I've never seen her like this!" for he genuinely did not understand. "Very well then," he resumed. "You wish to keep the boy?"

"Yes," she said, simply.

"Allowing Garrassime to stay near him and—forgive me—myself to defray all their joint expenses. It is a matter of pride with me."

"Of all the ungracious bundles of thorns I have ever encountered—" she commenced, but he would not let her speak.

"Permit me," he interrupted. "I do not mean to be ungracious—ungrateful—you must know that! I am so deeply touched, on the contrary, by—" His voice altered all of a sudden, and Marguerite felt a lump rise in her throat.

They had reached what is called there an *étoile des bois*, otherwise a wide grassy spot where five roads meet in a star-shaped clearing, and Basil jerked "The Cid" to a stand.

"If you don't mind," he said, still a little hoarsely, "we could dismount and sit down here while Ireland waters the beasts."

For answer she slipped off "Narses" in her customary unexpected way, and stood by his head, stroking him; the rascal allowing her to rub his velvet nose with carefully disguised contentment.

Ireland having trotted up and assumed charge of the

MOONGLADE

horses—it was one of “Narses’s” peculiarities that he was sometimes approachable by a dismounted well-wisher, and, moreover, he did not hate Ireland a tenth part as much as he did his own grooms and stablemen—Basil and Marguerite were at liberty to seek a comfortable seat on a fallen tree-trunk.

“I wanted to say this to you, but lacked the courage to do so,” he shamefacedly admitted, his expression quite changed. “Also, something else, if you will only have patience.”

As years before on the brink of the Castle cliff at Plen-höel, Marguerite sat quite motionless, her mere profile visible, listening to Basil with eyes fixed on the most distant point they could discern.

“You and your father have been kinder to me than any one else in the world since my mother left me—kind and considerate beyond all expression. Now you want to go further yet and take off my hands a responsibility—a cruel responsibility—in short, one that is almost greater than I can bear!” He paused, and Marguerite, without turning toward him, said, quickly:

“Why do you say a cruel responsibility? You used to be so passionately fond of Piotr. Don’t you care for him any more?”

A flush of mortification and misery rose to Basil’s face. He had not seen the *impasse* in which he had engaged himself, and for a few seconds he could not think what to say.

Surprised at his silence, Marguerite made a slight motion and glanced at him interrogatively, but what she saw made her instantly resume her former position. “Good Heavens!” thought she, “what is it?”

“Marguerite,” Basil painfully recommenced, “the last few years have not been happy ones to me. Mind you, I blame no one but myself. I alone should have been called to account for—the lack of happiness I found in a

MOONGLADE

union I had sought, and desired at the time above all other things."

Again he paused, wiped the moisture from his forehead mechanically, and this time Marguerite did not make use of the pause; but a faint smile of incredulity, which it would have done him good to see had he been in a state to notice it, flitted at the corners of her mouth.

"Be this as it may, the fact remains that I have been wretchedly unhappy, that I am still so now, by *contre-coup*, perhaps. Much has happened that I must endeavor to forget—not for my own welfare alone, mind you—and this I cannot attempt if Piotr is with me. I mean that for that reason and some others I am forced to exile myself anew. It is useless to enter into particulars. Later you will perhaps understand why; now I cannot tell you. Will you trust me without explanation?"

"Yes," she said, unhesitatingly.

He gave a deep sigh of relief and thankfulness. "You are very—very much the *Chevalier* your father calls you," he said, humbly, "and I thank you with all my heart."

"But," she interrupted, with some indignation, "you have not answered my question. Have you a grudge against poor little Piotr? Yes or no?"

"A grudge?" Basil repeated after her—"a grudge against Piotr?"

"That's what I asked."

"No! Emphatically no! How could I? But—but he reminds me of his mother, and that can't be endured."

"Was that the reason of your leaving him with the de Salvières when you went to China?"

He saw the pit yawning before his feet, and felt too dazed to jump back from the brink.

"No—that is . . . yes! Oh, I don't know, Marguerite! Don't ask me!"

"You are terribly changed, Basil," she said, sadly. "I have long known—by intuition, for I was never told so—

MOONGLADE

that your marriage had been an unhappy one; but for you, a man like you" (the tone was emphatic) "to make your child pay for this, to deprive him of a father's love and refuse even to see him for an hour, is iniquitous. I am sorry to speak so rudely to you, Basil, but I cannot help it."

"You are not rude," he contradicted. "What you say is from your point of view right and fair, but—appearances are against me, whether justly or unjustly, I can't say. God! Do you think that I have not fought against that—feeling which estranges me from Piotr? I have sweated blood and water; I have . . ."

With sudden alarm Marguerite swerved toward him and with one small hand on his sleeve stared blankly at him.

"Are you crazy, Basil, to talk like this?" she asked. "Estranged from your own flesh and blood, your own little son, the dearest, sweetest little chap that ever was? Shame on you, I say, for letting yourself go as you do, for acting in a hysterical way unworthy of even the weakest woman!"

Her cheeks pink, her eyes sparkling with excitement, she was a revelation as she drew back from him in downright anger. Never had he imagined her to be capable of such a transformation.

"You make me boil!" she went on, clenching her little fists. "Don't you know that Piotr adores you? That he is *you*, your very image, although his coloring is more like his mother's? Oh, Basil, your own little son! How dare you think of making him responsible! Why, he is *you! you! you!*"

With a smothered oath Basil leaped to his feet, white as his sporting-cravat.

"What makes you act so?" she asked, rising quickly and trying to confront him; but he turned his back upon her and pushed off her detaining hand.

MOONGLADE

"Have you gone distracted?" she asked, and then stopped appalled, for his shoulders were shaking suspiciously. Trembling like a leaf, she stepped back in positive terror. She had never seen a man cry, and it is a sorrowful experience indeed when the man is a man.

"Basil," she whispered. "Basil! Please! Please don't! I did not mean to hurt you. . . . Oh, please forgive me, Basil!"

Struggling furiously with himself, cursing his fool's behavior with all the might of his being, he could not at first wrest the mastery, but in a few short moments he turned toward her, and in an almost inaudible voice begged her pardon.

"My pardon!" she tremulously murmured. "Mine? It is I who was in the wrong to torment you as I did. You know best what to do, of course. No doubt you have your reasons—reasons you will not tell me, although I think you should. But I am stupid—I know that—so don't remember what I said. Leave us Piotr. We will look after him well, and teach him how to love you more and more every day, so that when you come home at last this strange feeling of yours will be gone."

There was something so delicately childlike, so innocent and so crystal-pure in the words, that Basil felt tempted to kneel down in worship before her. What call had he to bring so near to her his thoughts of bitterness and revolt, his conviction that the child he was ready enough to confide to her bore the stain of antenatal dishonor? It was nothing short of blasphemy, of desecration, to have done this. And in his heart he thanked Heaven that, however imprudent his words had been, she, being what she was, could not guess what they portended.

The scene had been short, but it had left such traces upon both that when they slowly returned to their horses old Ireland almost cried out at the sight of them. He was wise in his generation, though, and the impassiveness with

MOONGLADE

which he regirthed "The Cid," "Narses," and his own mount, would have done credit to an articulated wooden image; but pounding behind them along the sunken forest road, where the twelve hoof-strokes fell hushedly upon the damp turf, he sadly reflected upon a future that seemed somber enough for his beloved young mistress. His shrewd wits had been alive for many a long month to the trouble that—as far as he knew—had begun for Mademoiselle "Gamin" at the time of that other ride in the woods to the "Rock of the Seven Sages" at Plenhœl. He had wondered vastly at Prince Basil's obtuseness (saving his presence), marveled over the aberration of taste that had caused this great gentleman to prefer Miss Seton to Marguerite; and ever since, during their now countless excursions over field and moor, forest and valley, he had watched over *Le Chevalier* "Gamin" as tenderly and pitifully as a mother might have done. And what was there amiss again? Surely Prince Basil was free now, and the legal formalities over, with a decorous interval added thereto, he could lead Mademoiselle de Plenhœl to the altar? Why those tears, then? Why the agitation and distress he had not been able to avoid noticing from his post beneath the trees some yards away? Was there more misery coming to her? No! that he could not believe. God is just and kind—he was sure of that—and could not but protect this little angel from Paradise, so true, so loyal, and so faithful!

On the morrow it was he, Ireland, the old *piqueux*, who sat beside His Serene-Highness in a dog-cart—by Basil's own request—to go to the station. The funereal express-age had been seen to, Laurence was making her last princely progress to the great White Empire she had so absolutely abhorred, and Tatiana began to hope that soon, save for the exquisitely tended spot where Preston Wynne slept, the whole grewsome tragedy would be forgotten.

MOONGLADE

As the slate roof of the little railway station became visible through the trees Basil suddenly turned to Ireland. "I don't know how long I will be away," he said, as if talking to an equal and a friend. "You know, Ireland, that Piotr is going to stay at Plenhœl with the Marquis and Mademoiselle during my absence."

"I do, Highness."

"Very well. You will probably be called upon to act as riding-master to him, just as you were years ago to the 'Gamin.'"

"I hope I will, Highness," said Ireland, happily.

"This being so, you will need to know the time of day to a minute. With a wild youngster like Piotr it will be necessary, I am certain."

Ireland permitted himself a smile; wondering, though, why each time that the Prince pronounced his son's name there occurred so startling a hardening of his voice.

"Now," continued Basil, "this is a reliable time-keeper." He passed both reins into his right hand, and with the left jerked from his waistcoat pocket his own chronometer by Juergeson—a priceless gem of its kind—and held it out, chain and all, to the astounded man beside him.

"Oh, but—but Your Highness! This is Your Highness's own watch—there's a crown on it!"

"I know," Basil smiled. "It is not meant to be a tip, Ireland; merely a souvenir from one horseman to another."

The fast trotter in the shafts was just rounding the angle of the station yard. Basil gave the reins to Ireland and jumped out. Far down the line the shrill whistle of the express was cutting the breeze like an arrow.

"Good-bye, Ireland," Basil said, leaning across to shake hands; and suddenly Ireland, recovering from his joyful surprise, saw that the Prince's eyes were moist.

"Good-bye . . . and take care of her!"

MOONGLADE

He was gone inside the little building, all alone like the most ordinary of the mortals. A minute later the *piqueux*, through the row of oak-trees that stood between, glimpsed his tall figure passing down the platform; then the train breathed itself to a second's stop at the waving of the flag, Basil stepped to the *marche-pied* of a Pullman, and with a last wave to him disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI

Moonglade, a pale and forthright splendor, deeping
The mountain shadows on the river-flow,
Across the sullen flood's resistless creeping—
Across the years, the wreckage and the weeping,
 You stand, so let them go!
Moonglade, O Moonglade, that my heart doth fill,
Causeway to Avalon unchanging still,
 I know, that pass by thee,
The "bowery hollows, crowned with summer sea!"

A YEAR later the "Gamin" and Piotr were returning from a delightful prawn-fishing expedition in the deep rock pools that offer at low tide, especially on granite shores such as those of Plenhœl, miraculous chances for that kind of sport. *Haveneaux* on shoulder, they stepped briskly along the cliff path, she looking like a little girl in her short striped petticoat and *tricot* made and worn à *la manière des marins*, her red *béret* and rope-soled *éspadrilles*; he enormously tall and strong for his age, browned by salt water and salt breezes to a very becoming brownness. Behind them Garrassime—who seemed to have stopped getting old during the past twelve months—and Madame Hortense, always placid and comely, carried between them a great square basket fragrant of brine and seaweed, that was quite full of big, frisky *bouquins*.

"We've got a lot!" Piotr remarked, gleefully. "And all of them as long as my hand, aren't they, little darling Malou?"

"Oh, every bit," laughed Marguerite. "I'm not going to argue, Piotr."

MOONGLADE

"But you don't seem convinced!"

"Not convinced! You do me an injustice, young man!" remonstrated Marguerite.

"We can eat them for the second breakfast, can't we?"

"Not can; *must!*" she corrected, gravely. "They're good only when fresh off the farm, you know, *Moussaillon.*"

"I like it when you call me *Moussaillon*, little darling Malou," the boy said, proudly. "Don't you think I am a wonderful sailor already? And as to swimming and fishing!" He smacked his rosy lips ecstatically, glancing up at her for confirmation of these tall words.

"A wonderful sailor—a swimmer of extraordinary power—and as to a fisherman!" she mimicked, her lovely face crinkling into a grimace that well suited her name of "Gamin."

"You're laughing at me! But I handle the *avirons* almost as well as *Boustifaille*. You know I do."

"Boustifaille" was Piotr's *canot* boy, a wide-awake lad of fourteen, who was to ship next May on a "Banker," and Marguerite smiled at the boastfulness of Master Piotr; although, to do him justice, the child was a born seaman, fearless as a porpoise, and inclined to be utterly reckless of any danger.

For these particular traits she knew herself to be responsible. She had been and was his constant companion and instructor in the arts of natation, rowing, sailing, and fishing, and never tired of encouraging him to display further prowess. The life of Piotr at Plenhœl was ideal, between "Antinoüs," who had come to love the boy almost as if he were his own, and Marguerite, his best and most devoted comrade. In return, nothing could be more touching than Piotr's fealty to his lady. There were times, it is true—during his less and less frequent fits of rage—when even she could not manage him. But usually for a mere touch of her hand, a slightly

MOONGLADE

sterner glance from her blue eyes, he really tried to calm himself—with more or less success, it is true, but still with extraordinary determination for one so young.

The chief difficulty with him was to conquer his ever-present jealousy. Perhaps Laurence had only partly assumed the rôle of a jealous woman. Probably she was really inclined that way, and had needed only a trifling exaggeration to serve her purpose, for her son was, unfortunately for him and for others, abnormally provided with that sad faculty for making every being dear to one entirely miserable. Let Marguerite display the least bit of enthusiasm, or flattering appreciation, toward anyone, a puppy-dog even, and Piotr would be at once convulsed with fury. He did not sulk; he stormed whole-souledly; he threw himself on the ground and he rolled over and over, shrieking aloud, beating his head on the floor, tearing his hair, actually foaming at the mouth; and so painful were these outbreaks that they were considered at Plenhœl as visitations to be avoided by every possible means.

"If he were mine," the village doctor, a retired surgeon-major of the navy, often said, "I'd make him acquainted with a rope's end, and that without delay. Is it possible to see a youngster get himself into such states and remain neutral? Only mademoiselle is capable of it, but she's an angel of God. Besides, she'd crawl through a knot-hole to please him."

Perchance the doctor was right, perhaps he was wrong, in his particular choice of a remedy, but, be it as it may, Marguerite would not hear of drastic measures; in which opinion her father bore her out, for, as he sagely remarked, with such an organization it was impossible to know what brute force might produce.

In spite of these two wretched blemishes, Piotr was the most fascinating boy one could imagine, and Plenhœl paid him homage as to a beloved Dauphin. Ireland, Monsieur Quentin, François, Madame Hortense, the

MOONGLADE

coachmen, gardeners, stablemen, *chefs*, footmen, grooms, the aged housekeeper, the maids, not to mention the farmers, villagers, and salt-workers, were his willing subjects. As to the crews of the yacht and sailing-boats, they raised him to the throne of a little sea-god, pure and simple.

Warm-hearted, hot-headed, plucky as they make 'em, and generous to a fault, this was Piotr. Also he had the religion of remembrance—a rare gift—and not a day passed without his speaking of his father. He was handsome, too, to a surprising, an alarming degree; with features too classically perfect for a lad of his years, and magnetic eyes, changeful in shape and hue with every new expression.

"Quand il aura vingt ans il faudra enlever les poulettes, par exemple!" the doctor was quoted as declaring on repeated occasions, and this seemed like prophetic talk.

Basil wrote almost regularly to Régis, "from China or India, Mars or the Moon," as the Marquis was wont to vaguely explain, and Marguerite helped Piotr pencil a couple of lines to accompany every one of her father's replies to each of those erratic missives.

My dear, dear Papa. When are you coming back?
I am very big now. I love you.

PIOTR.

he had written the evening before the prawn-fishing, but, as he impatiently declared, "I never get a letter from him, little darling Malou!"

Marguerite cruelly felt this persistent neglect of Piotr. She invented messages with untiring assiduity, but as a matter of fact, "*Mes remerciements émus à ma cousine Marguerite*," was the only allusion ever made by Basil to Piotr's existence.

The de Salvières were in Russia, looking after both their own estates and Basil's; Pavlo was now a first-lieutenant

MOONGLADE

of great promise; the peasants of Tverna, trotting easily in firm but light harness, exploded no longer. As Tatiana once had told Preston Wynne, "*Tout est pour le mieux dans ce meilleur des mondes.*"

It was then that a cloud no bigger than a man's hand began to float imperceptibly upward toward the coast of Brittany from the blunt apex of South Africa, where Basil had been sojourning for a while, as a letter bore witness:

I am heartily tired of wandering [he wrote confidentially to Régis]. Weary of visiting place after place which holds no interest for me, and yet I cannot make up my mind to settle down again, either in France or in Russia. There seems nothing for me to do in either—or, for the matter of that, anywhere else in the world, alas! Duties I have none left—or if I have, disgust obstructs my view, and I do not see them. As soon as Piotr is old enough to be put in a military academy I will know better what to do. I had a nice surprise some time ago! Imagine that among the effects and personal possessions left in the Paris house by the lady who bore my name, and which I had caused to be packed and stowed away under the supervision of Stepàn-Stepànovitch, my agent, he found a writing-map I had once given her—a very splendid affair of Tula-work and turquoises. Well, overstepping my orders, he made an exhaustive examination of this object, read with a looking-glass from the reversed writing printed and on the blotting-paper inside, more convincing proofs yet of her guilty conduct with the young English captain I had the misfortune to despatch from this world—God knows his life was too dear a price to pay for her love—and also traces of equally enlightening letters written to that poor chap who gave me satisfaction in a way—Heaven is my witness—I will mourn for a long time to come. I would much rather that Stepàn had let bad enough alone. It is hard as it is to try and forget a little of all this—if not to forgive it. But now to come to the real point of my letter: Do you think I could venture to come and spend a few days near you? Not at Plenhôel, for I cannot—no, I cannot see Piotr just yet—but in the neighborhood, so as to be enabled to see *you* and discuss matters with you. I am thinking of starting

MOONGLADE

for Canada, or perhaps Mexico, afterward; I don't know which, nor do I much care! One thing is certain: I will not go to the States, and be looked upon from the moment of landing as a conspirator, a fugitive from justice, a mendicant in gilded guise, or a wretched fortune-hunter. I don't blame the people over there for seeing an intriguer and a scoundrel under every coronet that submits itself to their criticism—perhaps they should not receive them either enthusiastically or cringingly; not, at all events, before they have made a few inquiries as to their wearer's particular brand of indignity—for, when one comes to think of the needy and abject individuals who are continually "crossing the Pond," as the English say, to offer to the highest female bidder imitation names, bogus titles, or genuine ones so tarnished as to have become unrecognizable, how can one feel surprise at the variegated denunciations which transatlantic invaders of our shores indulge in? Forgive this vacuous and interminable missive. I am alone, sad, bad-tempered, and altogether uninhabitable. Indeed, it would have been far simpler for me to tell you at the outset, like a man, that I am yearning for a home—anybody's, since my own is destroyed, and sign myself,

Your affectionate

BASIL.

Régis had not hesitated an instant. To his practical sense—he had a good deal of that, and very well developed—it appeared only too clearly that, unless something rather drastic was done, Basil would gradually let himself drift into positive melancholia, and his warm heart revolted at the thought; so without losing a minute, he had written and cabled to his cousin to come at once; ridiculed his distaste for seeing Piotr, whom he described as a most delicious boy and a true Palitzin; accused Basil squarely and fairly of giving way too much to his morbid feelings; and had, indeed, made such good use of an eloquence he rarely lacked when both his brain and his heart were in accord, that a cable from Gibraltar had finally announced to him the arrival of Basil in a few days.

"We will cure him, *mon Chevalier*," "Antinoüs" said to

MOONGLADE

his daughter when announcing the news to her. "These fancies of his are simply absurd—there's no other word for it."

Marguerite looked her father suddenly straight in the eyes. She was sitting on the window-sill of his study, while he stood, a cigarette between his teeth, both hands stuck deep in his jacket pockets, looking out at the glancing fountain with its quaint presentations of kneeling monks and curious, unnatural stone birds—a masterpiece from the same chisel as had carved the unique doorway of the Castle chapel.

"Papa," said the "Gamin," gravely, "you don't believe it, I know, but I am no longer a little girl. Don't you think you could tell me why Basil has ceased to care for Piotr? There is some reason for it, some very serious reason, for he is the last man on earth one could accuse of caprice—a feminine defect, besides! Why can't you tell me what makes him feel as he does?"

Régis did not answer at once. He had long been in the habit of treating Marguerite as a very precious companion and counselor; moreover, she was right in saying that she was no longer a little girl, for in her country and in her world girls not yet married at eighteen, even, are supposed to be determined to remain old maids. Still, it was utterly impossible to so much as hint at the truth, and he decided to seek an acceptable alternative.

"What makes you so sure that Basil has really ceased to care for his son?" he asked, throwing away his cigarette end to light a fresh one.

"What he himself told me," she replied, unhesitatingly. "Also, his impossible attitude toward Piotr. Now, Papa, you and I realize that he is not doing this idly—*pour se donner des airs*."

"No, certainly not!" admitted Régis, still looking at the marvelous procession of hooded and unhooded monks mirrored in the limpid water of the fountain. "But

MOONGLADE

you must not forget that Basil had a terrible shock, that—”

Marguerite here firmly interrupted him. “If you are going to tergiversate, my dear Papa,” she said, quietly, “we may as well drop the subject once and for all. I’d a great deal sooner you’d tell me to mind my own business, or, in other words, that I am poaching on land where I have no right to intrude. At least it would show me a straight road out.”

“*Mon Chevalier*,” Régis retorted, “you and I have managed to be far more than father and daughter to each other, as this closest of relationships is generally understood. We have been friends and equals right through. You are—I don’t want to throw bouquets at you—but you really are the most perfect gentleman I have ever had the fortune to encounter, and in all questions of honor there is no one I would rather consult than you. But you are at the same time my beloved little daughter and a pearl of extreme purity; therefore I do tell you, in all amity, not to ask me that question again. As far as I know, moreover, Basil’s only reason for the coldness he displays toward Piotr—and that undeniably exists—is that the child reminds him of Laurence, and of the sorrows Laurence brought into his life. He is one of those persons who, owing to a singularly uncompromising nature, are apt to burn fiercely what they once adored, and *vice versa*. I am convinced, however, that, were the proper influence exerted, he could be won over to saner and fairer sentiments. Hadn’t you better try to do that yourself?”

Marguerite flushed, but her eyes did not waver from her father’s.

“You are the only person who can,” he emphasized.

“Frankly, Papa, if you don’t mind my saying it, I have no more influence on Basil than Garrassime has.”

“And to think that she sincerely believes that!” Régis mused, gazing at the “Gamin” in her dark-gray riding-

MOONGLADE

habit, slim and young, and good to look at beyond compare. "My own little girl!" he thought, tenderly. "How I wish she could be happy. And to think that that fool of a Basil considers himself too smirched and dishonored now to ever ask her to be his wife!" Aloud he said, simply: "You are entirely mistaken, *Chevalier*. You have lived a life far more protected and sheltered than most modern girls, even when they have been strictly brought up. What you know of men is represented by myself, Jean de Salvières, and some other relatives of the same stamp. We all and sundry are not a bad sort, and have the breeding to show our best side to our women. Tatiana and the other few feminine personalities you come in contact with, including that excellent creature Hortense, are *hors concours*; delightful as far as perfection can go, and the only bad un you ever met was that misguided being, Laurence."

"Oh, Papa, remember!" Marguerite pleaded, much distressed.

"I remember, my dear, never fear! Nor am I especially harsh in mentioning the fact that Laurence was a very evil woman. God knows she was. Basil made a frightful mistake when he married her, and has lived to regret it. He is sore now; embittered; *refoulé sur lui même*; restive to any interference coming from his people, from me, from his best and most intimate friends. But you are different! I am not speaking from undue pride in you, or because you can always lead me by one thread of your silken hair, so don't shake your head. You have to a supreme degree the *cavata* necessary to wield power of the only kind that will work with him—and bear in mind that the warmest corner of his heart has always been yours."

Marguerite rose. "I don't believe that!" she said, with utter frankness. "At least I never saw any sign of such a thing, Papa."

"That again is due to your inexperience. Basil is

MOONGLADE

naturally cold, distant, and self-contained—wooden, if you like—and a bit introspective. He is also, funny as it may seem to you, a shy man. Believe me, *Chevalier*, I am anxious to see the ice wall that surrounds him—how poetically I do speak!—broken through. He has suffered quite enough already. You, I am absolutely certain, can humanize him again. Now will you, or will you not, do your little best? Answer me!”

Marguerite had an unbounded confidence in her father. She saw that he was very much in earnest—a rare thing with him, who to all intents and purposes generally toyed with life’s difficulties; and her surrender was quick.

“You really, genuinely, think that I can do something to help?” she asked. “You really believe that Basil is in danger?”

“I answer yes on both counts, unhesitatingly,” Régis declared. “Basil is in a bad way, which is a thousand pities, for he is the finest man I know; also I stick by what I said—you alone, my little witch, can make him hear reason. I have spoken!”

Later on, when *le Chevalier* “*Gamin*” was alone in her own apartments that overlooked the ocean on two sides, she sat for a long while by a window staring at the waves. She was firmly convinced that the secret she had so well kept with regard to her personal feelings was still her only own; Basil could and would never be anything else to her but a dear and devoted friend. He—she felt certain, too—had given all the love he had in his power to give to Laurence. Her ingratitude, her hardness of heart, her lack of sympathy with any and every plan of his, had caused him a pain and a disappointment from which he would never recover. She was forced to conclude that on this point he showed himself singularly unforgiving, not to say unjust, since he carried his rancor to the limit of the impossible by his disaffection toward his son and hers. Excuses! She found them for him in what her

MOONGLADE

father had told her an hour before, and it was a relief in a way. Basil was not himself; he was alone; the shock had been too severe even for his iron organization. Well then, why not do what she was asked? Why not try, at least? Perhaps she would succeed. . . . Who could tell? And if she could bring father and son together again, what unspeakable joy that would be!

With a little sigh of anticipation, half dread and half hope, she got out of her chair and, opening the window, stepped upon the balcony. The evening was all gray and silver, streaked with rose where the sun had just disappeared. The mews were hurrying home to their rock-nests in the cliff, skimming over the surface of the spangled sea, winging their way athwart the salt-marshes on the right, where the tent-like heaps of salt gleamed whitely, and the shallow waters—cross-barred by thin banks of clay—were now squares of pink crystal, leaded into a broad prostrate window of afterglow. A little sail of surprising whiteness and daintiness punctuated the offing with its swallow-winged silhouette, and on the horizon a clear-cut band of incredible apple-green lay along the sky. It seemed as if it would have been soft to the touch—a length of pure velvet, the color of Hope.

"Oh, Basil!" Marguerite gently called. "You will listen, won't you?" Her white arms outstretched to the immensity opening before her, she suddenly gave a little laugh of triumph. "He will!" she thought. "I know he will now! I mean to try so well!"

Strong in her resolution, Marguerite went about her hundred and one duties during the following week with a quaint little conquering air that made Régis's eyes follow her amusedly, and a little wistfully, too. Could he ever resign himself to give her up, even partly, even to Basil? He had reflected over the matter in the depths of his heart, and well did he know that this queer little *Chevalier* of his would go bravely through life alone, un-

MOONGLADE

wed, yearning assuredly for a home and children of her own, but cheerful always, and uncomplaining. So much beauty and love wasted on him, "Antinoüs"—an aging "Antinoüs" in spite of his youthful looks—since this very morning he had found one silver thread among the gold above his temple. What an everlasting and beastly pity that would be! Basil was only a very little his junior; but since she liked him so—and that he never doubted for an instant. Well, parents had to make sacrifices, sometimes much more bitter than this—if it ever came to pass—and Heaven knew it would be bitter enough. Still, he knew that the "Gamin" would always be his, and that she would suffer no permanent separation from him, which was an immense consolation.

Thus devised Régis, riding home from a horse-fair in the dim neighborhood—dim in two ways, for in Brittany distances over waste places are great, and, moreover, night was falling rapidly.

Indeed, the moon was already shining hazily when he dismounted. Marguerite was, as always, standing on the broad shallow *perron* waiting for him, and he waved his hand to her with a positively lover-like gesture as he gave his horse to the groom. But whose was the tall, dark silhouette towering behind her?

With a view-halloo of astounding fervor Régis sprang up the steps, and in another instant he was pounding Basil most heartily on the back.

"Welcome! and welcome! and a thousand welcomes! old fellow!" he cried, beaming with pleasure. "That's right. When did you come?"

"Half an hour ago, and Marguerite has spent every second of it assuring me that I have not aged. What do you think of your daughter's veracity now?"

"The highest possible thinks!" Régis cried, whirling his cousin around. "Let's look at you here under the luster! Why, you're more bronzed and more soldierly,

MOONGLADE

that's all I can discover. A fine figure of a man, as Quentin once said when I showed him the famous statue of Roland I had just brought home from Paris."

They laughed, all three, quite immoderately at this exuberant joke, and walked into the dining-room arm in arm, the "Gamin" in the middle, as befitted her smaller size. The evening that followed was an enchanting one. Where was Basil's melancholy? The two others had not even leisure to ask themselves that; and as to him, he had so much to tell about his peregrinations half around the globe and back again, so much to listen to as told by them, that in the excitement of recital he forgot his woes for the first time in months and months.

Midnight had long chimed solemnly from the Castle clock when they at last left the library where they had spent the *veillée*, and marched side by side down the immense second-floor gallery upon which all the bedrooms opened. Basil and Régis took Marguerite to her door, and were about to say good-night, when she suddenly swerved to the right and, noiselessly opening another, beckoned them to follow, one finger on her lips commanding silence. Régis understood, and fell back to let Basil pass, while he, thinking of some joke to be perpetrated upon him, obeyed, on tiptoe, assuming a portentous mien.

Immediately behind Marguerite he entered a room of truly enormous dimensions, high-ceiled, and hung with gay cretonne, upon which, as far as he could see, fairy-like birds disported themselves around dream-flowers. The furniture was all of white lacquer, and the thick carpet underfoot of similar snowiness, with here and there an ice-bear skin flung across its stainless surface. A tall screen of carved wood was curved before the cretonne-curtained windows, and to this recess Marguerite led the way, still on the points of her slippers. The rosy globe hanging from the ceiling did not give very much light,

MOONGLADE

but quite sufficient to bring Basil suddenly to a stop, for there, on a narrow brass bed, the silken coverings thrown back from his sturdy little form, lay, fast asleep, the handsomest boy it was possible to see. The shapely, strong limbs, the tanned, slightly flushed cheeks, the soft curling hair and thickly fringed eyelids, made a picture vigorous and beautiful, to which Marguerite, her fingers on Basil's sleeve, pointed proudly.

"Behold your son!" she murmured, laughingly; and Basil suddenly shivered from head to foot.

"Your son!" she repeated, in a fragrant whisper, leaning closer to him. "Your son, and your second self. Look!"

Above the bed hung a portrait of Basil when yet a lad, and given to Régis's mother at the time. The diffused glow from the night-lamp somehow seemed to concentrate upon the lifelike painting before which it was hung, and it would have taken a purposely obtuse eye not to be struck by the amazing resemblance between it and the little sleeper beneath. In her innocent endeavor to reconquer Basil's love for Piotr, Marguerite could not have designed a more Machiavelian plan. "*Aux innocents les mains pleines*," says the old proverb, and who can call it untrue?

Without a word Basil was staring, first at the picture, then at the living, breathing miniature thereof on the pillow; and Marguerite, watching him with all the intentness of her blue eyes, saw the rigid features slowly relax, soften, hesitate as it were in their expression of dawning ecstasy.

"What is it?" she breathed faintly, more to herself than to him.

Big drops of sweat were trickling down Basil's ashen face, and she leaned toward him, her heart literally in her mouth. What had she done? she asked herself in terror. And then a stranger thing yet happened; for Piotr,

MOONGLADE

as if touched by some magnetic ray, opened wide his eyes, and with a cry of delight, one agile boyish bound, launched himself like an arrow into his father's arms.

"Papa!"

Marguerite fell back, appalled. Would Basil repulse that appeal? But no! his arms closed upon the quivering boy, and Marguerite, turning, ran to the door and fell upon Régis's shoulder.

"He loves him still! He loves him still!" she gasped, laughing and crying at the same time.

And in a little while they were all in the room together, Basil with Piotr on his knee, Régis and Marguerite and Garrassime—in his long linen *kaftán*—one tear after another coursing down the middle of his nose in a fashion most comical had it not been so pathetic, everybody speaking at once of the most variegated things, so that nobody could understand a word that was said.

Later—was it an hour, a minute, a year?—none there could have told—Piotr was induced to return to his slumbers, and Garrassime to his side of the screen, for what little was left of the night. Dame Luna was sliding down the ultramarine slope of the sky at a rapid rate. On the edge of the shingle left bare by the tide sea-larks were beginning to move restlessly in the clusters of glass thistles and sand-poppies where they adventure their sleep, and from the mysterious east transparent scarfs of faintest nacre heralded the coming of the dawn. The air was so pure, so fresh, so exquisitely briny, that as they passed the open bay of the gallery they could not resist the temptation of breathing it in. They were silent, now, all three, quite silent, and stood facing the sea in a sort of reverence for its beauty that found no expression in words.

Marguerite—a slender white shadow silvered by that unearthly light so few have the fortune to catch—leaned over the balustrade, her heart beating with gentle triumph.

MOONGLADE

"Moonglade!" murmured Régis, indicating the graceful silhouette outlined so tenderly against the still, moonlit water. "You were right!"

Basil turned and looked at his friend and kinsman. "Will you give her to me?" he said, very low.

Régis raised both shoulders and eyes to Heaven in a gesture of complex, almost amusing resignation.

"Go and ask her!" he said in the same tone, and went inside to wait for them.

CHAPTER XXII

Heaven, and Hell, and this earthly ball,
And Jealousy confounds them all.

"I HAVE always loved you! You only! You alone, ever since you were a little baby no higher than my knee!"

Marguerite laughed. "You are a vile flatterer!" she declared, making an adorable little grimace at her lord and master. "Who would have thought that my grim mentor of years ago—oh, so many years ago!—would one day descend to such trickery?"

They were sitting under the pink-and-white awning of their villa on the "Azure Coast"—as it is so fittingly called. In front of them a heavy garland of ivy-geraniums, a mass of rose-colored bloom nestling in their white-and-green foliage, seemed the *rendez-vous* of every butterfly of the littoral. Marguerite's gown was rose-hued, too, and her favorite floppy shape of garden hat was covered with pink acacia; on the love-finger of her left hand glowed the great ruby of her *fiançailles*, and Basil, in a spirit of emulation, wore a pink-and-white carnation in the lapel of his light-gray morning coat.

The honeymoon was, officially speaking, over, but only officially, for those two would be lovers always; and soon they would sail north again, where Régis and Piotr awaited their return with what patience they could muster.

It had been a pretty wedding *au-village*. The Castle

MOONGLADE

chapel filled with flowers, the peasants and sailors and salt-workers in their gala costumes, the bagpipes blowing merrily on the green outside, and a whole ox roasting under the trees for the feast given to all the people, who, had come for miles around to do honor to the *Chevalier "Gamin."* Tatiana and Jean and Pavlo had arrived from Russia, other friends and relatives from all corners of France, and also from other lands, and during a week the countryside had been *en-fête*.

Piotr as his father's best man had made a brave show, wearing proudly a Court suit with a little sword at his side; and as to the bride herself, words fail to describe that dream-maiden in her cloud of whiteness, like wreaths of delicate vapor one over the other, caught up here and there by clusters of odorous blossoms from the *orangerie*; and her long illusion veil, with the diadem of orange-buds that held something mystical in its fragrant purity. At Basil's demand the "Moonglade" idea he loved was carried out by a jewel—the only one she wore—which he had himself designed, and combined, and ordered—a crescent moon of palest sapphires embedded in diamonds, and drooping from it fluent chain after fluent chain of the same gems—so exquisitely wrought that one could discover no setting—falling from her heart, over which the crescent was fastened, sideways, to the edge of her skirt in a wavy succession of softly shimmering rays, like those of a very young moon over misty water. Tatiana had cried out that *fiancées* in France wear no gems, and this is true enough, in the real "world" of old principles and aristocratic ways, but Basil had pleaded, and Marguerite had declared that his word was her law; and so Tatiana had yielded, laughing over her own discomfiture.

When at last the long days of festivity were over, Piotr, who, strange to relate, had displayed no jealousy of his father, had been taken to Salvières for a time by Régis to avoid his moping after his "little darling Malou."

MOONGLADE

Two months had now elapsed since all these incidents: the vagabondage of the *voyage-de-noces* was over, and Marguerite's yacht, *La Mauve* (Jean de Salvières's marriage-gift to her), was waiting at anchor on the blue Mediterranean waters, a few cable-lengths from the villa, to take them back to Brittany.

"Will you like it at Plenhöel?" Marguerite asked, suddenly, a little anxiety in her voice, for the only shadow in her happiness was the thought that perhaps her Basil would miss Russia and his active life there among his own people.

"Will I like it?" he laughed. "Why d'you think I might not?"

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "Brittany is not over-cheerful with its wild seas, its storms, its bleak moorlands and rock-girt shores. I adore it, but then I was born there, you know, which makes all the difference."

"You perhaps forget that I am a bit of a Breton myself," he retorted. "Not such a bad combination, either—Celt and Slav. What do you say, Madame 'Moonglade'?"

"I find it extremely satisfactory," she admitted, "still, I wish I were sure that you like it altogether—as much as you do Russia?"

Basil threw his half-smoked cigarette far into the bushes near the sea-wall, and rose.

"I didn't want to talk about it; indeed, nothing was farther from my mind than to let the very essence of a surprise out of the bag, but you are irresistible, my little siren, and so here goes!"

"What *are* you talking about?" asked Marguerite, wide-eyed.

"This: do you remember a certain antique ruin with many *beaux-restes* like your old friend Madame de Belbye . . . a ruin, say I, perched on a lofty rock, with forests of cork-oaks and other useful vegetables unfurling their ever-green waves against the demantibulated bastions of the

MOONGLADE

above-mentioned fortress, a few leagues only from Plenhöel?"

"*La Tour du Chevalier!*" she cried, her eyes dancing with interest—" *La Tour du Chevalier!* the old warhold where Du Guesclin dwelt, and before him dozens of other great knights of Brittany, for hundreds and hundreds of years . . . the finest, most romantic spot that exists or has ever existed!"

"The same!" gravely admitted Basil.

"And what of it?" she demanded, breathlessly.

"What of it? There's a question to ask! What of it, forsooth? Millions of workmen—you know how I despise exaggeration—millions of workmen, therefore, are even now dealing with those mossy ancient stones, those tottering battlements where your hero . . . and other heroes—you have such a collection of them, by the way, Marguerite—enough to make one horribly jealous—"

"Were not one the chief and dearest of them all?" she interrupted him.

He bowed, his hand on his heart. "Thanks, my lady-love, queen of my soul. Those tottering battlements, as I was endeavoring to explain—well, in short, the workmen are cementing their reunion. Flocks of decorators under the guidance of the most distinguished Viollet-le-Duc of our period are at this very instant evoking the past, poring over documentary evidence in black, and red-letter, tearing their hair and rolling their eyes, and laying back their ears in the endeavor to put together again *La Tour du Chevalier* as it once reigned over the border—*La Tour du Chevalier*, for one *Chevalier* 'Gamin,' whose home in Brittany it is to be."

With a cry of delight Marguerite jumped up and threw her arms around her husband's neck.

"Oh! You fairy prince! Aladdin of the Wonder-Lamp! Do you mean it? Is the *Tour du Chevalier* to come back to life for my sake? Really? Really?"

MOONGLADE

With eyes full of joyful tears she nestled against him. The dream of her childhood had come true at the touch of a magician's wand, as it were; and he, who had not realized quite what boundless pleasure he was giving, held closely the happy little creature he worshiped. Nor did he entirely understand until she told him of her roving to the *Tour du Chevalier* from her earliest childhood, her evocations there of Merlin and Mélusine, and the knights of Arthur riding in their splendid armor under the forest boughs. Of how she had wandered untiringly in and out of the dismantled halls and roofless galleries, the enormous crackling walls of which seemed held together merely by huge clinging ropes of ivy thick as a man's leg. Ah! *La Tour du Chevalier* had been her fairest record of chivalry, her window into that mediæval period where she had lived in thought, and whence she seemed to have emerged armed *cap-à-pié* with the virtues of those great Ages—their heroism and dauntlessness, their generosity and nobility and faith. And wasn't Basil a proud man that day!

"Would it be ready?" she inquired, in the fashion of a child asking when Christmas will be here. "Could it be possible that it would be ready soon?"

Never had Basil been so conscious of the power of great wealth as he was now. Yes! The multiplication of hands and of ducats was easy to him, as easy, he asserted, as, "Kiss your hand, my lady." Nothing was being neglected to hasten *l'accomplissement du rêve*. Moreover, ever since that unclouded morn when she had said "Yes" to him, the work had been going on. "So there, Madame 'Moonglade,' reassure yourself. Your slightest desire is an order to me—" etc., etc.—*da-capo*—to the end of the chapter!

So one very fine day, "once upon a time," as the good Perrault tells us in his *Contes de Fées*, the prince and his princess returned from afar, and lo, and behold! the keys

MOONGLADE

of the citadel were presented to them by their leal son and *maître-du-palais* on a velvet cushion that he held on bended knee—Piotr in azure velvet, his curls falling on a broad lace collar, his plumed bonnet in one sunburnt hand—a *dauphin* after their own heart.

Régis felt as if his "Gamin" had been spirited away for eons upon eons of time, but there she was again, close to him; so "Antinoüs" looked more "*Antinowistic*" than ever.

* * * * *

Months of happiness followed; days woven of silk and gold (*tissus de soie et d'or*), as the good saying goes, cloudless, enchanting; "almost too perfect to be real," mused Basil. Had he deserved it all? Presumably, since they were his and hers and Régis's and Piotr's; Piotr glorying in his father's reconquered love, in the constant tenderness of his little darling Malou.

One late afternoon he rushed into the octagonal salon where she sat often now before her embroidery-frame or at her spinnet, like those ladies of the long ago who had preceded her at the *Tour du Chevalier*. Greatly to Piotr's chagrin she did not gallop in the forest with him now, nor canoe on the inlet below the Castle, nor undertake those league-long rambles over the moors that he was so fond of. She was, however, if possible, more tender than ever to him, and this consoled him somewhat.

"You are getting so lazy, little darling Malou!" he cried, throwing on her lap an armful of almond-scented white-and-pink thorn he had wrenched from its prickly fastness with some damage to his strong little fingers. "Why don't you come out and play with me and Papa? We are throwing the *paume*—like Henri-Quatre and his gentlemen."

Marguerite laughed. "Come here, Piotr," she said, making room for him on the broad window-seat beside her. "I want to speak to you, my son."

MOONGLADE

"Isn't it funny, little darling Malou? It's true I am your son now! Just as Cousin Pavlo is Aunt Tatiana's; but I'm your comrade and playfellow the same as I always was, and you love me better than any, any one else in the world."

"I love your Papa, too," she said, smiling, "and my own Papa, and Pavlo's Papa—such a lot of Papas!"

"Yes, but I don't mind that; they're all big gentlemen, and you can't love them as you do your little Piotr. Can you?"

"There are many different kinds of love—as many as there are kinds of stars in the sky, Piotr. They are all beautiful, and created to illuminate the dark places of the world; for where there is no love there is no light, my little one, and people are always plunged in gloom."

"You do speak awfully pretty, little darling Malou. I like to listen to what you say."

"Thank you, Piotr; so now listen. In a little while your father and I—if you are very good—are going to make you a present of a little playmate. He will be very tiny and awkward at the beginning, but he will grow up fast, and be able to romp with you, and toss the *paume* like Henri-Quatre. Won't you be pleased, Piotr?"

The boy, leaning against her knees, looked slowly up at her, his eyes heavy with doubt.

"Is that another fairy-tale, like the ones you tell me every day, little darling Malou?" he asked, the corners of his mouth beginning to droop.

"A fairy-tale? Why, no, Piotr, it's a true, true story!"

"And," the child continued, "will you *truly, truly* bring another Piotr here to play with me instead of you and Papa and Uncle Régis?"

Marguerite was not quite reassured. She knew her Piotr too well, and her thumbs began to prick oddly, as she claimed they invariably did when trouble was afoot.

"I imagined you'd like it very much," she cautiously

MOONGLADE

hazarded, not by any means certain of her ground and feeling her way about, so to speak.

Piotr's strongly marked dark brows came together above his imperious little nose and his nostrils quivered.

"I would hate it!" he said, decisively; "so don't bring a disgusting brat here, little darling Malou, or I'll pitch him in the *oubliettes* under the great round tower. I swear I will!"

She noticed a nervous twitching of his left eyebrow, which she was acquainted with as a very bad sign of the weather, and she hastened to try and smooth things down.

"Don't talk like that, darling," she said, stroking the rebellious head. "You know very well that you would never do anything so wicked; besides, you might get to be awfully fond of your little playmate."

With a sudden brutality of gesture utterly disconcerting, Piotr snatched the starry branches from Marguerite's lap and threw them helter-skelter across the room. Then turning, he fled toward the door.

"Piotr," she called, very calmly, "come back to Malou!"

She had not stirred, her face was white; but there was no quiver in her voice, and the child, his hand already on the knob, paused at full tension, his back toward her.

"Come back here, please!" Again she did not raise her tone, but there was a new quality in it; and very reluctantly, his face dark as thunder, Piotr retraced his steps one by one until he stood within a foot of her.

"My little Piotr," she murmured, very tenderly, "are you going to be bad with me, too?"

No answer. Her heart for a moment misgave her, but she held out her arms to him with infinite gentleness.

"Don't you love Malou any more, Piotr?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

Fiercely the boy flung himself upon her and began to

MOONGLADE

sob noiselessly, convulsively, with pitiful indrawings of the breath; and now she could no longer doubt what was coming. Weak and dizzy, she felt like calling aloud for help, but the mere thought of bringing Basil upon the scene, and of what his anger would be against Piotr, choked the appeal in her throat. Instead she gathered him closer and closer to her, crooning over him, hoping that she might once more avert the storm as she had so often done before; but the very roots of his being seemed to have been shaken, and nothing she could do would calm him.

At last there was a momentary lull, when, exhausted by his jealous fury, Piotr lay panting across her knees, head down, face hidden, throbbing all over like a little over-charged engine.

"Piotr," she ventured, ready to burst into tears herself—"Piotr, please, please be quiet. You hurt me!"

Like a galvanized frog the boy bounded away from her, and, swaying back and forth, his eyes ablaze, literally shaking from head to foot in his uncontrollable rage, he roared:

"Promise you won't bring the beast—promise—promise—promise—or I—tell—you—I'll bash in his—his—h-head!" And all at once he rolled on the carpet at her feet, kicking with all his might.

At that unfortunate moment Basil opened the door and walked in. One glance, and although he had never as yet seen his son in one of these fits, he understood, also he realized the risk of such a scene for Marguerite, and in two strides he reached Piotr and, picking him up as if he weighed an ounce, held him tight.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" he asked, grimly.

"Basil!" Marguerite cried, rushing to him. "Basil! For God's sake—he doesn't know what he is doing! Please, for my sake, don't be harsh!"

"Never you mind, Marguerite," Basil answered, greatly

MOONGLADE

alarmed for her. "I won't be harsh, but we must understand each other, he and I."

An understanding did not seem likely to result, for Piotr, far from desisting, was wriggling desperately in Basil's arms, poor little chap! maddened by the impossibility of escape, his face gray, his eyes nearly starting out of his head; and Marguerite suddenly caught hold of her husband's shoulder with a grip that surprised him.

"You sha'n't do that!" she commanded. "He is quite beside himself. You'll only make it worse. Give him to me. I know what to do when he is like this!"

What would have followed cannot be conjectured had not Garrassime, attracted by the noise, and guessing what was happening, run into the room and, without a word, taken hold of Piotr and carried him off without further ceremony, still kicking and yelling.

Basil, for an instant completely dumfounded, remained planted, as it were, in the middle of the room, while Marguerite, thoroughly ashamed of her momentary loss of self-control, hung her head and twisted the ends of her peignoir ribbons, vainly trying to recapture herself.

"Well!" said Basil at last. "Well, this is a pretty state of things! Is he often like that, Marguerite? I never knew—my poor little girl!"

With difficulty she prevented her voice from trembling. "No; very rarely," she said, shortly.

"Then what made him burst out like that? But here, for pity's sake, sit down, Marguerite. This *is* pleasant for you!"

"No! Not if you will only not interfere," she faltered. "I couldn't bear to see you two *aux-prises*. It was my fault. I tried to—to prepare him for what is—what is coming, that's all."

She had gone back to her seat in the window and glanced imploringly up at him. Quickly he joined her and, bending before her, took her little icy hands in one of his.

MOONGLADE

"I beg your pardon from my heart. I beg your pardon, Marguerite," he said, penitently. "You should not have had to suffer this!"

"My poor boy!" she tremulously murmured. "It is from you I should have wished to keep it concealed. He is such a fine little chap! He can't help what he does now and then, and punishment would only make it worse. I know it. I am convinced that force would be folly to attempt. Don't you ever try it!"

Touched by her courage and exceeding generosity he stared at her. "I believe from my soul you are more than half an angel," he said. "I shall do what you say, whatever happens—I give you my word on it; but still he should be made to understand what he does. What may not one of these attacks bring about?"

"He will get out of it when he grows older," she pleaded. "He is so very manly that one easily forgets what a baby he is yet."

"My God!" Basil was thinking, "what obscure inheritance is this the result of?" And suddenly the image of Laurence flashed before him, Laurence beautiful and vicious, cankered inwardly like a fruit, splendid to the eye only.

He took a couple of turns up and down before speaking again.

"It is jealousy, then?" he said at length, stopping in front of her.

"Yes," she admitted, "jealousy of me."

"Then," Basil continued, "why isn't he jealous of my love for you, my presence near you?"

"He just told me," she said, with the ghost of a smile lurking at the corners of her rosy mouth—for she had already recovered her delicate color—"that I couldn't possibly love a grown-up gentleman like you as I did him—my little Piotr."

Basil could not help laughing. "That's ingenious!"

MOONGLADE

he conceded; "very ingenious and plausible — and fortunate, too! What would we do if he had extended these kindly sentiments to me?"

"I don't know. Sufficient unto the hour is the wonderment thereof," she replied, delighted to find that he was not disposed to take the affair too tragically. "A few weeks ago he wanted to fight a duel with *Boustifaille*, his *ex-canoë* lad, when he came to pay his respects on his return from the Banks, because I was imprudent enough to admire the finely bronzed appearance of the interesting *Terre-neuvas*."

"Wanted to fight him? Swords or pistols for two, eh?" asked Basil, amused in spite of himself.

"Clasp-knives, if you please," she responded. "Clasp-knives, sailor fashion."

"Oh," commented Basil, "nothing if not energetic!"

"Mercy, yes! Blood will tell, you know! You yourself are no milksop, my dearest Basil. Neither were your ancestors, from all I've heard and read."

A shadow passed over his forehead. He could not as yet quite endure being reminded of the horrible period of doubt he had gone through with regard to Piotr's birth-right. During the last days of their sojourn on the *Côte-d'Azur* they had come unexpectedly, and most unpleasantly for him, across Sir Robert and Lady Seton stepping from the dinghy of their yacht. There had been a moment's embarrassment, and then all four had sauntered on the promenade together, studiously avoiding any allusion to Laurence. Later on, by a special, if somewhat diffident, request of the nautical baronet, Basil had rowed back with him to the yacht for a short talk—a rather painful experience. Sir Robert, his choleric blue eye cocked up to the saloon skylight of the *Phyllis*, had roundly denounced his late niece, overbearing Basil's chivalrous silence, and, glad to be able to let himself go for once, had used language of exceeding saltiness—picturesque,

MOONGLADE

much to the point, and altogether adequate even to that subject.

This encounter had re-opened a wound or two which had not been very prompt to heal again, and had served, moreover, to show him how very much more deeply he had suffered during his first marriage than he had believed.

"I must dress for dinner now," Marguerite said, cutting into his unamiable reminiscences. "Run along, dear, and do likewise."

"Are you going to dress at once," he asked, "or do you intend to go mooning after Piotr to get the latest bulletin, Madame 'Moonglade'?"

"I shall do, beloved, just precisely as I see fit," she laughed. "You gave me Piotr quite a long time ago as an earnest of good-will. He is, therefore, more mine than anybody else's—past, present, or future—so kindly turn your exclusive attention to the tying of your cravat—the color of your buttonhole flower. I shall make myself very beautiful in rose and silver, since it is my lord's favorite combination of tints, and meanwhile I bid you God-speed."

She courtesied to him, made a quick little run, raised her delicious mouth to be kissed, and in a flurry of gauze and cobwebby lace disappeared through the narrow door in the arras leading to her apartments.

CHAPTER XXIII

To draw the sting, withouten fail
Endeth the evil; and this tale.

"ISN'T he a beauty?" the "Gamin" asked, lifting her baby from the great white blanket upon which he was crawling about, and flourishing him in her extended arms toward Pavlo, who had arrived an hour before from Salvières.

"Man or woman?" the young officer demanded, somewhat peremptorily. "I can never remember the sex of a thing not old enough to wear trousers."

"Awfully stupid of you!" Marguerite contemptuously commented. "Especially since he bears your name, and you were his proxy-godfather, *mon ami!*"

"That's true, too!" admitted Pavlo, more meekly. "Proxy-godfather—not godfather by proxy. There's a difference."

"A very serious *nuance*," Marguerite reprehended; "you had the honor of proxyfying (Lord! I wonder if that's the right way to put it?) His Majesty the Autocrat of All the Russias, and came loaded down with offerings like the Magi. Whew! You mind that golden christening-goblet studded with clear-set rubies and diamonds as big as haricot beans? It was a sore temptation not to have them strung into a necklace for myself."

"As if your jewel-coffers were not teeming and running over already," he scoffed. "Don't forget your own little *cadeau-de-relevailles* from the same Imperial source, Madame la Princesse Palitzin. Pearls the size of hazel-

nuts—large hazelnuts at that—are not picked up in the hoof-prints of a pack-mule.” And he pointed to the strands coiled about her white neck beneath the sheer ananas-batiste of her corsage. “Why, they reveal their orient, smoored as they are by this stuff you wear.”

“Smoored,” she shrugged. “Who ever heard of speaking so insolently of autocratic pearls?”

Marguerite, though transformed by the plenitude of her happiness, was never more than now deserving of her nickname of “Moonglade.” Standing there on the broad terrace of *La Tour du Chevalier*, she looked every bit as young as she had done when Basil had visited her at the Hôtel de Plenhœl just after his marriage with Laurence Seton. Slender, erect, ethereal as ever, and dainty with the daintiness of a flower, there was nothing full-blown as yet about *this* Marguerite of Marguerites, and her father, walking up from the plaisance, smiled with pride as he saw her.

“Oh!” she cried. “Here is Grandpapa—such a venerable Grandpapa! Pull his mustache, Pavlo, junior—a corn-colored mustache, too, as silky as your hair, baby mine! Isn’t it a scandal to look so indecently youthful, my father dear?”

Régis laughed. He certainly did not give a very grandfatherly impression, for he stubbornly refused to become even middle-aged, and was still the *beau-sabreur* and passionate sportsman he had always been. His daughter’s ideal existence with Basil was an everlasting joy to him, and now he beamed upon the little group on the terrace. Suddenly his smile disappeared.

“Look out, *Chevalier!*” he said, precipitately; and to Pavlo’s immense astonishment Marguerite hastily put his small namesake down on the blanket, looking almost fearfully over her shoulder.

“Don’t praise the baby before Piotr!” she whispered to him. “I’ll explain later.”

MOONGLADE

His mouth wide open with astonishment, the young *Garde-à-Cheval* saw Piotr emerge at a lively trot from the long flight of stone steps leading up from a lower terrace and fly like a dart toward him—Piotr transformed into a big boy in long sailor-trousers, a nautical blouse, and a *béret*, with the words *La Mauve* in gold gleaming on its ribbon, thrust well to the back of his head.

"Hallo, Cousin Pavlo!" the boy cried. "They told me you had come, so I ran as fast as I could!" And doffing his *béret* in right gallant fashion, he held out his brown hand in greeting.

"*Saperlipopette!*" exclaimed Pavlo. "The heir of the House of Palitzin leaves nothing to be desired, it seems to me."

With an amusing tilt of his eminently patrician nose Piotr looked his cousin up and down, and, preternaturally solemn, declared, "Neither does the heir of the House of Salvières!"

There was a general burst of merriment.

"This comes," Régis gravely pronounced, as soon as he could speak, "of being brought up entirely among grown people. One knows one's ropes early."

"Are you going to stay long with us, Cousin Pavlo?" demanded the undismayed Piotr.

"Fairly so, if you'll permit it, my dear cousin."

"I do! But it's only because you are too old now to be a playmate that I like your being here."

"You surprise me, Monsieur Piotr!" said Pavlo, who was quite genuinely amazed. "Might I so far venture as to ask what set objection you have against playmates?"

"It's little darling Malou's fault," imperturbably explained Piotr. "Fancy, Cousin Pavlo, that some months ago she threatened to give me one—a playmate who would take her place and Papa's, and toss the *paume* with me."

"Well?" inquired Pavlo. "Was there anything offensive about that?"

MOONGLADE

Piotr's face had turned a little pale, his eyes narrowing almost to slits.

"No," he grumbled, "not as it turned out at last. But you see, Cousin Pavlo, it might have been different."

"*What* might have been different?" insisted Pavlo. "Can't you explain better than that, Piotr?"

"No!" the boy replied, his frank and open expression suddenly transformed into sulkiness. "I don't like to talk about it. Come and see my soldiers, Cousin Pavlo; it will be much more pleasant. They are," he continued, resuming his ordinary tone and mien, "*Gardes-à-Cheval* like yourself. And just think, Papa gave me a real, big, splendid camp, with a mess-tent and little *isbas* exactly like those at *your* camp—the soldiers are five inches tall, and the horses all in proportion."

"What sort of a playroom have you got, my friend, to hold such an outfit?" asked Pavlo, smiling.

"Oh, the whole floor of a tower!" cried Piotr, triumphantly. "My little darling Malou arranged it all for me. She thinks of nobody but me. Don't you, little darling Malou?" And with the most tender and winning smile imaginable, the boy clasped Marguerite's waist in both arms and looked adoringly up at her.

"*Voyez vous ça!* There's cheek for you!" cried Pavlo. "And what about your father and little Pavlo here? Doesn't she think of them sometimes?"

The smile vanished from Piotr's face. "Papa knew her long before she knew me," he said. "Also he is an old gentleman with gray hair—so he doesn't count; and as to that rubber bath-doll there," and he contemptuously pointed at his little brother, "how could she love it? It only says *Youm-youm* and *Gaga-gaga*. It's an idiot!"

As ill-luck would have it, the baby, wholly unconscious of the anathema pronounced against him, selected that risky moment for a *coup-de-théâtre* of immense magnitude. Sitting up on his blanket, he suddenly raised his head,

MOONGLADE

opened his rosebud of a mouth, and in the rather heart-shaking fashion of the first word ever pronounced, clearly uttered, "*Mayou!*"

Marguerite, flushing with delight, started forward to catch him in her arms, but Régis, quicker than she, interposed himself, and, lifting the little fellow, began tossing him up and down as if nothing out of the common had taken place.

"What!" Piotr asked in a queer, trembling voice—"what did it say?"

Pavlo was on the point of translating his godson's loyal effort to say "Malou" like Piotr himself, but a glance at Marguerite's distressed face stopped him, and with a presence of mind quite above praise explained, instead: "Why, didn't you hear, Piotr? He said *Gou-gou* or *Mou-mou*, or some other ununderstandable thing of the kind. He is too little to talk yet."

"That's good!" came from Piotr. "I thought he had said 'Malou.' And no one has a right to say that excepting me. Malou is *my* little darling Malou!"

"Oh, come, you're getting to be a bore with your ridiculous ideas!" Pavlo interrupted, rather sharply, for, uninitiated into the risks of the situation, he was amazed at the extraordinary tolerance of Marguerite and Régis, as well as at the appalled glances exchanged between the nurse—a superb Bretonne in her gorgeous costume—and Garrassime, who had been standing behind Piotr, a silent witness of this curious scene.

Fortunately at that moment Basil came striding along the terrace, creating a much-needed diversion, and Garrassime, seizing the occasion, suggested to Piotr to come and arrange his camp for Lieutenant Pavlo's inspection.

As soon as they had disappeared Pavlo irritably turned to Marguerite and asked her, with some military brusqueness, "What the dickens was up?" at which simple remark Marguerite, to everybody's distress, suddenly

broke into a passion of tears. Marguerite—the “Gamin,” Knight of the Golden Spur, weeping, was something unheard, undreamed of! Basil took her in his arms, looking savagely at poor Pavlo, who, in utter consternation, was gazing helplessly at Régis.

“Here!” the latter cried. “Take your boy. He deserves a reward, and so do you.” And he put little Pavlo hastily on his mother’s lap. “Meanwhile,” he continued, “I’ll go and keep Master Piotr away. Come with me, Pavlo, and I’ll tell you what’s amiss.”

* * * * *

“Little Pavlo” was undoubtedly breaking from the chrysalis of babyhood. “*Il gigotte comme un petit diable*,” Divyne, the nurse, proudly stated to Garrassime, whose proficiency in French, and even in Breton, was growing daily more remarkable. “*Il va se mettre a marcher tout à l’heure!*” declared Divyne, and Garrassime’s face was a study of mingled appreciation for his littlest master’s precocity, and of terror at the thought of the sole and only Palitzin Tyrant left—namely, Prince Piotr-the-Jealous—as Pavlo de Salvières had nicknamed him in an imprudent moment. Nor was Garrassime the only one at the *Tour du Chevalier* who entertained that mixture of feelings, three parts delight and one part anxiety. Basil, since the day of the baby’s first attempt to talk, was at a loss what to do; Marguerite, continually pulled between her worship of her own beautiful son and her love for Piotr, was growing thin; Régis was continually on the watch; and Pavlo thought within himself that a sound flogging in the right quarter would avoid many difficulties, but, being extremely adaptable, he forebore to say so, having noticed how far more than useless such an observation would be.

One rather rough afternoon, following a storm when the sea was still heaving from its recent stress, and the

MOONGLADE

sky a mass of glorious white and pale-gray clouds tossing about against patches of intermittently revealed azure, Marguerite was changing from her morning gown into her riding-habit, when Divyne knocked at the door of her dressing-room and, being bidden to enter, did so, carrying the baby on her arm. A prettier child it would have been difficult to find. Dimpled like a cherub, his satiny round face crowned by an already thick crop of curls—blonde as his mother's—and lighted by eyes of blue resembling hers quite startlingly in shape and color, he was bubbling with happy life.

"Madame la Princesse," quoth Divyne, smiling from one ear to the other, "he has just said it again—Malou—and laugh! Oh, *ma doué*, he laughed so one could have heard him as far as the semaphore!"

Marguerite, turning away from her maid, who was about to unfasten her lace petticoat, took the boy in her arms and kissed him with the passion she could only indulge when certain of Piotr's absence. She was in a hurry, for she was to meet Basil, Régis, and Pavlo the Greater, at her old favorite spot, the Carrefour of the Seven Sages, within the hour, and Ireland was already in the *Cour-d'honneur* with her horse and his, waiting; but, happy to have her darling all to herself for once, she began to pace up and down with him, holding him close and tight and kissing his fat little neck again and again. Suddenly Pavlo minor, as they passed the open door of the adjoining bedroom, caught sight of a portrait of Basil in the scarlet of his *livrée* as master of the fox-hounds, surrounded by his dogs. The likeness was vivid, and the baby, with a cry of recognition, said as plain as plain could be: "Papa! Papa!"

Marguerite, hardly believing her ears, ran into the room and, raising the baby high up, exclaimed rapturously: "Yes, my own little son, that's your Papa! Your dear, dear Papa!"

MOONGLADE

Pavlo crowed with pleasure, throwing himself back on his mother's pretty shoulder; then poking a pudgy finger into her soft cheek, opened his mouth and again spoke: "*Malou*," he said, "*Malou-maman*."

Marguerite sat right down on the carpet and literally rained kisses upon this prodigy.

"My clever baby," she crooned over him. "Was there ever in the world such a wonder, such a treasure? Wait till Papa hears you say that, you darling, just wait!"

The nurse and the maid, chatting together in whispers by the dressing-room window, were not attending, Marguerite lost in admiration did not hear, and yet at this juncture there was a curious motion of the portières separating Basil's room from his wife's, a smothered sob, and then a light scurry of little feet running away. Could any of the three women have seen the livid fury masking the face of Piotr as he fled through corridor after corridor to a back stairs leading upon the terrace, what might not have been spared to all?

Almost immediately Marguerite, remembering Basil, and how absurdly anxious he would be if she was not there on time, reluctantly gave the baby to his nurse, with the hundred recommendations which invariably followed such an act, and, relinquishing herself to her maid's hands, implored her to hurry, in comic accents of despair.

Divyne, the methodical Bretonne, left the room, slowly descended the main stairs, and went out by the *perron*. The wind had fallen to a breeze, singing now over the waves, and murmuring in the thick mantle of ivy luxuriantly draping the portion of the walls at the foot of which she generally took her charge for an airing. The baby, vexed,¹ doubtless, at being removed with so little ceremony from his mother's room, was fretful, and Divyne glanced quickly around to see if the footman specially detailed for that service had disposed the big white rug and the toys in their accustomed place. But, no, this had not

MOONGLADE

been done, and she began to call him at the top of her voice.

There was no answer; the noise of the surf below was too loud to permit a lesser sound to penetrate into the Castle, so the Bretonne retraced her steps and went quickly to a side passage leading to the servants' hall.

"Louis!" she cried. "Hé! Louis!— Pierre! Jean-Marie!" She tried again, hoping that another of the footmen on duty would hear her, but this collective call remained unanswered, too, and, getting impatient, Divyne placed little Pavlo very carefully on the thick rug and ran to the farther end of the corridor to bawl out at better advantage. At last she heard, from the depths of beyond, manly accents responding, "*Présent, Mam'selle Divyne!*" It was the recreant Louis coming at full speed, and Divyne went to pick baby up from the rug. And then the footman heard a shriek that lent wings to his feet.

The baby was gone.

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
*	*	*	*	*	*	*

"Will you never be through?" Marguerite was telling her maid. "Here, give me my hat and stick! Well! Well! Well! Haven't I got my boots on yet?" She rushed to a window and, bending out, shouted to Ireland: "Leave my horse with the groom, Irry, and gallop on to the *Carrefour* to tell monsieur that I am coming. I've been delayed, and he'll be anxious!"

For a second Ireland looked dubiously at the now empty window, but his *Chevalier* "*Gamin's*" orders must be obeyed, and, leaping into the saddle, he was off.

"Poor old chap!" laughed Marguerite as, shortly afterward, she vaulted into her own saddle. "I'm sure he is convinced that I am unable to reach the *Carrefour* without him. I'll take the short cut and surprise him on the way. He's gone by the avenue." With which charitable reso-

MOONGLADE

lution she set her horse going at a rapid trot along the narrow path skirting the old fortifications above the sea.

"Merrythought," a powerful hunter Basil had given her on her last birthday, was sagely picking his way, and was both shocked and amazed when a sudden violent pull at the reins brought him almost to his haunches just as he was enflading the broader sandy road along the beach. Marguerite jumped, and as she jumped she tore at the fastenings of her skirt, kicking off her boots and leaving "Merrythought" to shift for himself all at one and the same time. Then she ran—ran as she had never run before, to meet the incoming waves.

Already several cable-lengths from shore, her own canoe—a slight affair of canvas and whalebone—unsinkable, so it was claimed—was tossing violently up and down in the trough, and in the canoe sat Piotr, rigid as a statue, holding in front of him little Pavlo.

"God give me strength!" she prayed, as she flung herself into the water and swam in long, regular strokes, rising to each successive surge, putting out all the force that was in her. "God grant that I can be in time!" she implored, feeling how slowly she was overhauling that fine-weather toy, so buoyant and so light! Piotr, his back to her, had not seen her yet, and while on the top of a long wave she shouted to him to row back, for she guessed that the tiny oars were still fastened inside the little craft, and knew that he could manage it if he were so minded. But he did not hear, and she lost sight of him as she slid down a slope of green water, her hair in her eyes, her arms stiffening in her supreme efforts to be quick, only quick!

The sun between two clouds was—it seemed to her a minute later—winking ironically at her plight. She felt dizzy and sick with the agony she was going through; she, even she, the best swimmer on the coast! She rose again, sparing her breath, and all of a sudden she found herself close to the canoe, balanced on the crest of a wave.

MOONGLADE

With a desperate clutch of her right arm she seized hold of its flimsy gunwale and hung on. Piotr saw the little hand, gave a startled yell and let go of the baby, who tumbled to the bottom of the narrow boat.

How she controlled Piotr at that moment, how she succeeded in piloting the canoe—into which she could not climb for fear of upsetting it and its precious cargo—to the shore, Marguerite never knew. All she remembered was what looked to her like a crowd waist-deep in the foam, pulling her and her boys to dry land, and later, much later, the arms of Basil around her as she lay on some soft couch, trying her best to swallow something strong and hot that the old doctor was holding to her lips.

* * * * *

“Never! Never again! I know you never will, my poor darling!”

It was Marguerite, four days later, speaking to Piotr—a little pale shadow of himself, with big hollows under his eyes—kneeling at her feet.

The lesson had been hard. The reward was great. For now she knew that, come what might, the boy who could suffer as he had done when for a few hours her life had been despaired of, was great enough in heart and mind to be transformed for ever after.

And she was not mistaken; for thenceforth her task was light, her happiness unclouded.

THE END

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